

Walter Wheldon (1879 – 1933)

I was lucky enough to find a Field Service Post Card on Ebay a couple of weeks ago. From what I understand from listening to a Paul Reed “Old Front Line” podcast recently, these were known as “Whizz Bangs” by the troops at the time.



NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

I am quite well.

I have been admitted into hospital

*{ sick } and am going on well.
{ wounded } and hope to be discharged soon.*

I am being sent down to the base.

*I have received your { letter dated _____
telegram ,, _____
parcel ,, _____*

Letter follows at first opportunity.

I have received no letter from you

*{ lately.
{ for a long time.*

**Signature
only.**

Pt W. Wheldon

Date _____

11/11/16

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

As you can see it is dated 11 November 1916 (posted 19 November 1916), “written” by Private Walter Wheldon and sent to his wife at 113 Grange Street, Burton-on-Trent.

All was well with Walter, he would write soon, but he had had “no letter from you lately”.

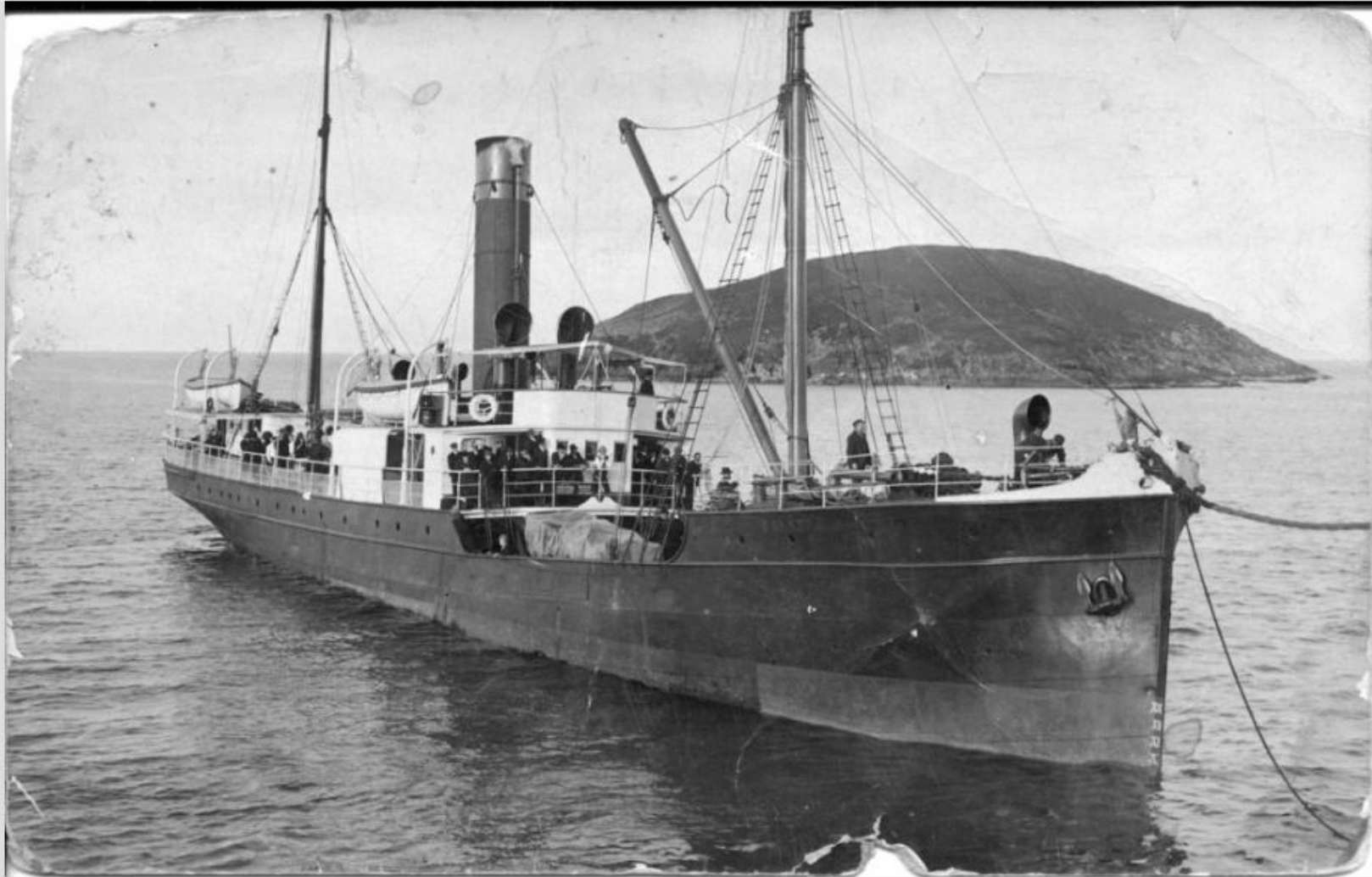
So, I thought I would delve a bit deeper to see what I could learn about this man and his service history. It didn’t quite take me where I was expecting!

Initial personal searches on Ancestry, with little to go on other than the name and address of Mrs Wheldon, led nowhere. So, I decided to concentrate on the address, starting with the 1921 Census. There I found his wife, Florence May Wheldon (nee Reid) and 2 sons, Sydney Arthur (aged 3) and Harold Walter (aged 2) living with Alfred Hall (remember that name), at 113 Grange Street, Burton-on-Trent. The journey had begun, but it took some unravelling.

Walter was born in 1879 in Burton-on-Trent; the fourth child of Richard (a brewer / innkeeper) and Jane (nee Kirk). From the 1881 census the family are living at 110 Grange Street; interestingly Alfred Hall is lodging with them, but more of him in a moment. In June 1887 father Richard passes away, but his mother re-marries; cue Alfred Hall. Finding the family in 1891 was a struggle, but there they are, all listed as Halls, living at 66a Henry Street, Horninglow. Walter is recorded as a scholar. In 1901 he is now working as a Labourer but living at the same address. He does not seem to appear in the 1911 census, so where could he be?

Ancestry kindly turned up a service history, but not quite what I was expecting. This is with the Australian Imperial Force. He must have emigrated sometime after 1901. From an excellent contact in Australia, thank you Jim, a W Wheldon travelled on the SS Cavanba from Sydney to Byron Bay (the most easterly point of mainland Australia), via Newcastle, on 20 October 1906 and arriving 2 days later. How he got to Sydney in the first place I am still looking for the details.

SS Cavanba mooring at Coffs Jetty, early 1911



"Courtesy of the City of Coffs Harbour"

Walter tried to enlist on 2 October 1915 at Tamworth, Armidale, in Australia, but was rejected on medical grounds; “bunion” on feet. However, two months later, on 19 December 1915, he is back, at Quirindi, and this time is passed fit with the comment “teeth now ok”. So, who knows how that conversation went. Prior to his enlistment he was a labourer.

He enlists and joins A Company, 34th Battalion, 9th Infantry Brigade of the AIF, number 220 (but see below re the subsequent change to 220A) and starts training. He is of course 38 years old at this point, being one of the oldest new recruits. His formal approval is dated 7 February 1916.

The 9th Brigade was in the 3rd Division of the AIF and was raised in 1916 as part of the expansion of the AIF.

The 9th Brigade was comprised of units that drew most of their men from NSW and comprised the 33rd, 34th 35th and 36th Battalions.

The 3rd Division was to be commanded by Major General John Monash and was concentrated in the UK for work up training during 1916, by which time all of the other Divisions had been committed to battle. Deployed in very late 1916, the Third Division's first major action was at Messines in June 1917.

Before Embarkation to Europe, he is paid 5 shillings a day. After Embarkation this changes to a Net Rate of 2 shillings a day (3 shillings being allocated “allotment in Australia” for his dependents, I guess his mother back in the UK but there are no records to support this), along with a daily rate of 1 shilling a day deferred until his service is complete. This may contribute to his speedy return to Australia once the fighting is over.

From the excellent Harrower Collection, we find not only an excellent narrative of the formation of the 34th Battalion but also a pictorial record. Walter might be there, somewhere, I hope.

“A” Company Officers were: Major W.A.LeRoy Fry, O.C. / Lieut R.J.Stewart, 2I/C, Lieuts J.W. Richardson, S.M.Harris, E. Shannon, W.W.Matthews.

Richardson, then a Captain, was to die on 12 October 1917 taking the Blue Line near Passchendaele and is commemorated on the Menin Gate. Shannon died on 1 June 1917 during a trench raid near Ploegsteert Wood and is buried in Strand Military Cemetery.

34th Battalion History



34TH BATTALION AIF. "Maitland's Own"

The 34th Battalion was raised in January 1916 at Maitland Showground in South Wales. It was planned that the bulk of the battalion's recruits be drawn from the Maitland area and thus dubbed "Maitland's Own". The First recruits for the 34th, however, hailed from the far northwest of the state and arrived at Maitland after joining a recruiting march that began at Walgett. These men were known as the "Wallabies".

The 34th Battalion became a part of the 9th Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division. On the 1st of May the Battalion left by train from Farley Station for the Showground in Sydney. Equipped with kit bags and necessary clothing, and was reviewed in Moore Park by [General: Gustave Mario RAMACIOTTI](#). On the following morning of the 2nd of May 1916 the men embarked on the transport HMAT A20 "Hororata" and sailed at 4:00 pm. Arriving in England in early July, the Battalion spent the next five months in training.

(Extracts from the Australian War Memorial)

WALLABIES RECRUITING MARCH.

MARCH ROUTE: *Walgett, Burren Junction, Wee Waa, Narrabri, Merehula, Turrawan, Baan Baa, Boggabri, Dubledah, Gunnedah, Curlewis, Breeza, Werris Creek, Quirindi, Willow Tree, Murrurundi, Wingen, Scone, Aberdeen, Muswellbrook, Liddell, Ravensworth, Camberwell, Glennies Creek, Singleton, Branxton, Cessnock, Abermain, Weston, Kurri Kurri, East Greta, Maitland, Morpeth, Minmi, West Wallsend, Wallsend, Lambton, Waratah, arriving at Newcastle on 8 January 1916.*
[Trove Article, \(March of the Wallabies\) December 1915.](#)

ON THE MARCH.

WALLABIES.

RECRUITING MEETING AT QUIRINDI.

QUIRINDI Saturday.

The march of the Wallabies down the main northern road to Sydney was commenced this morning. With the crossing through the Gap near Werris Creek, the broad plains of the north-west were left behind, and the Wallabies came into view of the Main Dividing Range. After breakfast this morning the column moved out of Werris Creek, the residents lining the

main street to bid them good-bye. Werris Creek, the great railway Junction of the northern and north-western lines, has its own particular way of saying farewell. It is the noisy, but effective way, beloved by railway men. The goods sidings and engine sheds extend out for nearly a mile beyond the station, and every engine, large and small, passenger class and goods class, gave out its shrillest cock-a-doodle-doo while the Wallabies marched along. At last the final scream from the open throttles died away, and the men settled down to a steady tramp on the soft, black road to Quirindi. A halt was made for midday lunch at Quipolly, provided by the residents of Werris Creek and Quipolly. Here Mr. H. S. Cusack handed the Wallabies over to the Quirindi Recruiting Association, represented by Mr H. H. Farrington (secretary) and in doing so commended officers and men on the exemplary conduct of the recruits.

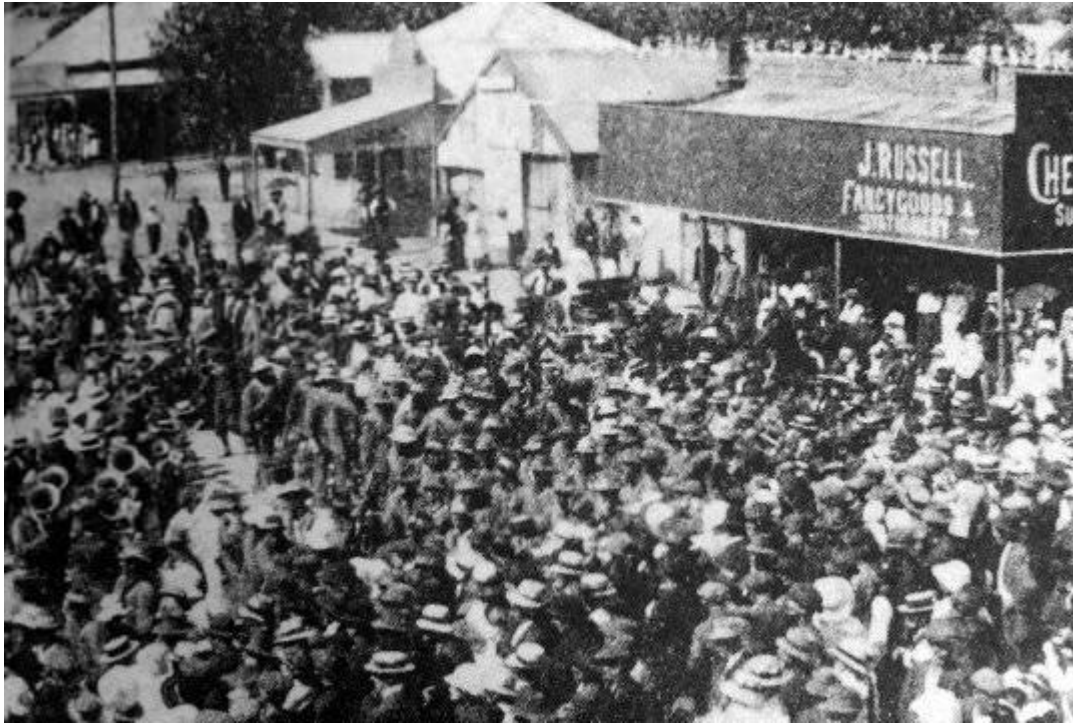
The Wallabies reached Quirindi this afternoon. On reaching the town boundary the column was met by the Mayor and President of the Quirindi Recruiting Association (Mr. W. P. B. Hungerford), and a large number of representative townsmen and ladies, who served them with cordials. The Mayor welcomed the Wallabies to town, and presented Captain Cameron with a large flag, and an original recruiting poster, calling on all to fight for the flag. Senior Sergeant Woods, then marshalled the procession, composed of an escort of mounted troopers, the town band, members of the Expeditionary Forces, officers, and men of the Wallabies, with Pipers Glen and Cork at the head, the militia, under Lieut. Noss, and a large number of motor cars and buggies. The line of procession was decorated with flags and bunting, and there were frequent bursts of cheering. The men were marched to the showground, where they are being quartered, meals being supplied at the various hotels. Another Wallaby was presented to the recruits by Mr. Richard Cook as a mascot.

At the recruiting meeting held in town to-night, four men came forward to join the colours in response of Sergeant Major Lee's appeal. The Sergeant-major emphasised the seriousness of the outlook and pointed out how ridiculous it was to hope that a nation, which, like Germany, had been preparing for a great war for 40 years, could be vanquished in 18 months. The sooner that was realised the better for the nation, and he assured them that never had the Empire entered into a war with so clean a conscience as the present one. These men of the Wallabies were prepared to go out and avenge the butcheries of Belgium and Poland, and, if necessary, lay down their lives to achieve their purpose He had left 250 acres in the west to God and good neighbours, to go out and do his bit. (Applause.) Seeing that their country had given them the honour of choosing for them-selves their course of action every honourable free man could not but offer his

services. He asked mothers in the name of humanity to allow their sons to volunteer and said that the girls should make it plain to the young men what they thought of their attitude in holding back when every man was wanted.

The Wallabies will rest over the weekend at Quirindi.

3rd January 1916. WESTON, NEW SOUTH WALES. *Weston people had always done well in public movements, but for the "Wallabies" they excelled all their previous efforts. They were received at the town boundary by a large crowd, and marched through crowded streets to the Olympia Hall, where afternoon tea awaited them. The interior of the hall presented a bright and attractive appearance, with its tables artistically decorated, tables laden with all that the soldier dearly loves when tired after a weary march. The streets, too, were gay with flags and streamers waving their welcome. The function in the hall was quite informal, but a few speeches were made. The King was toasted at the call of Councillor Morgan, who presided. Our Guests were eulogized by Messrs. Charlton and Kearsley, and Sergeant-Major Lee again responded with another appeal, which brought four recruits. The Rev. Varcoe Cock proposed The Ladies for whom Mr. T. Hadfield responded. A number of children, trained by Mesdames Davies and Malcolm, gave two delightfully rendered patriotic songs, which, with the pretty costumes of the children, were much appreciated. The arrangements were carried out by a committee of ladies and gentlemen, with Councillor Morgan, Chairman, Mr. T. W. Hancock, Treasurer, and Mr. W. Williams, Secretary, but to the ladies for their untiring zeal and splendid work, a special need of praise was due, for upon them rested the responsibility of making the visit a success, and it was a success in every sense. The Hebburn Colliery Band, which assisted at Cessnock on Sunday, was again in service and did much towards the success of the day. Highland pipes also gave a helping hand.'*



Plans to continue the march to Sydney were cancelled by military authorities who wished to use the marchers as the basis of a new locally-raised battalion. This was formed in February as the 34th Infantry Battalion, known, ironically, as Maitland's Own.

A sad and unexpected epitaph to the march was the death of the [Reverend: John WILKINSON](#) Methodist Minister, who had joined the march at Narrabri. He was killed by a lightning strike in West Maitland camp on 3 February 1916.



MAITLAND ENLISTMENT CAMP 1916. Tuesday 18th January 1916.

Private: 427 Martin James FARRELL. 3rd from Left. Private: 354 Samuel Leslie APHORPE. 2nd from Right.

MAITLAND DISTRICT. MAITLAND CAMP.

It was expected that the encampment on the Maitland Show Ground would have been opened yesterday by the marching in of the Wallabies, but on account of the necessary equipment not having arrived the opening of the camp must be delayed. An inspection of the ground was made yesterday by Captain Waddell, Camp Commandant, with Captain Clarke, medical officer, and Lieutenant Stewart, adjutant, when sites for the kitchens were selected. A couple of dry wells for waste water will probably be dug, and provision will have to be made for more shower baths. These are matters which are now receiving attention. In the meantime, it is hoped supplies from ordnance will come to hand in time to permit of the camp being opened on Wednesday. Major Molloy arrived from Newcastle this afternoon to take over the instructional staff work. An advance party of the Wallabies also arrived to do some preliminary work of preparation. In consequence of the delay in the arrival of supplies, it has also been found necessary to further postpone the going into camp of recruits passed at the local depot, who are due to report. It was intended that they should go into camp but owing to the non-arrival of the camp equipment, the earliest possible date that can now be fixed upon is Thursday.



Men of the 34th and 36th Battalions.

Standing: Pte. Richardson, Lance-corp. E. J. Conway, Lance-corp. K. Clinch. Sitting: Lance-corp. L. Courtney, Pte. G. E. Smith, Signlr. S. Brasil.

Back row, left to right: Private (Pte) Richardson, Private: 1091 (later Company Sergeant Major) Edmond James CONWAY and Private: 36 (later Lance Sergeant) John Kenneth CLINCH.

Front row: Lance Corporal: 736 Lawrence Patrick COURTNEY. - Private: 1241 (Later Sergeant) George Edward SMITH and Private: 1408 Stanley Herbert BRAZIL.

The Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate.

"Until the 10th of March, early training and formation of the Battalion was in progress. On that day the Battalion marched to the newly pitched camp at Rutherford and was completed with the exception of the Transport. These joined later and came from the Army Service Corps camp near Sydney. Here strenuous training was carried out and the men were very keen and fit, whilst their comfort and health were made a special study. Food was good and ample and sports and recreation were not overlooked".

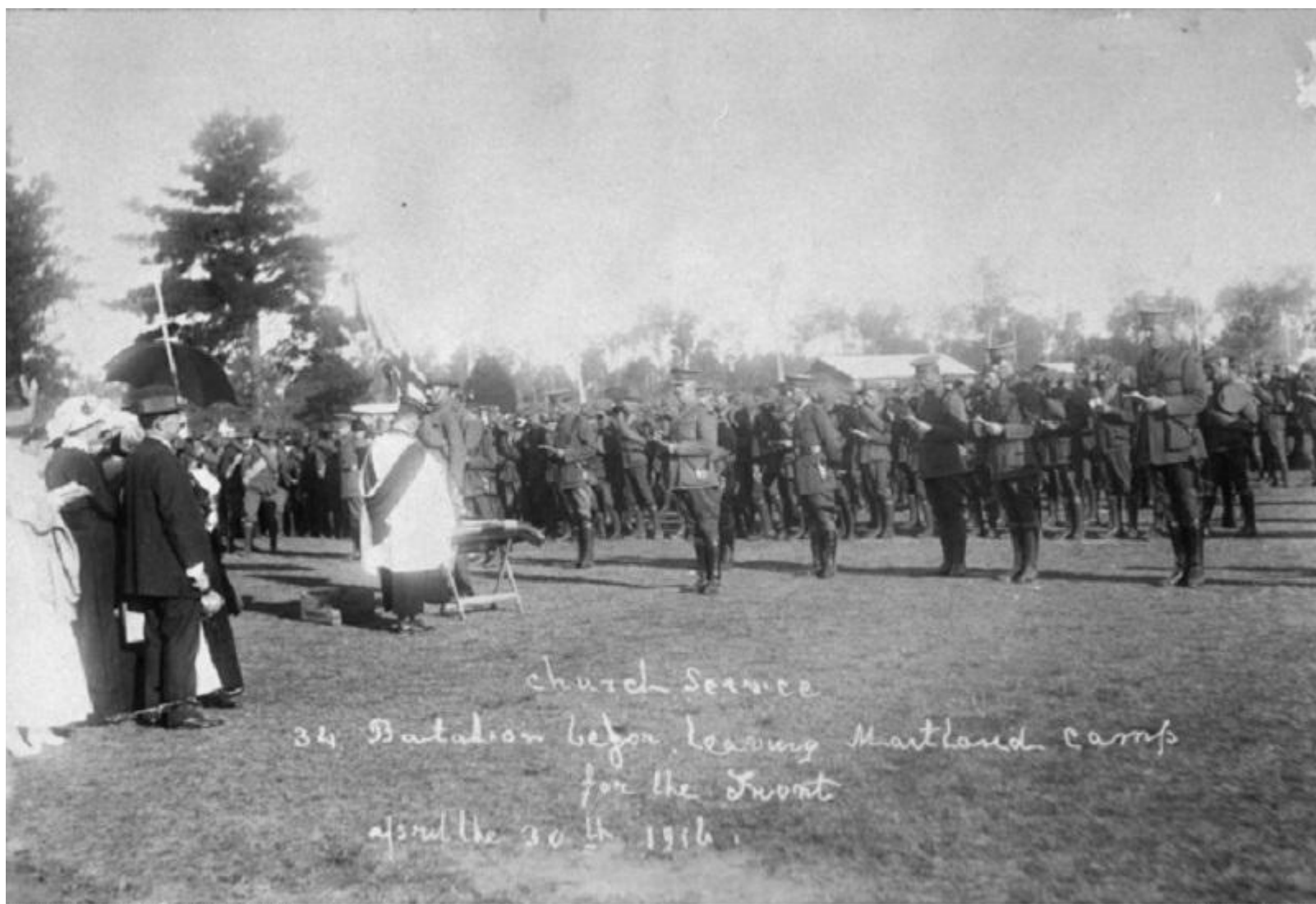


MAITLAND CAMP RUTHERFORD N.S.W. 1916.

A Girl's League was formed to cater for the comforts of the Battalion, under the supervision of Miss Violet MACKAY, who took a keen interest from the beginning, having, with the Mayor of Maitland met the men of the Wallaby March at East Greta and prepared dinner for them on their arrival.

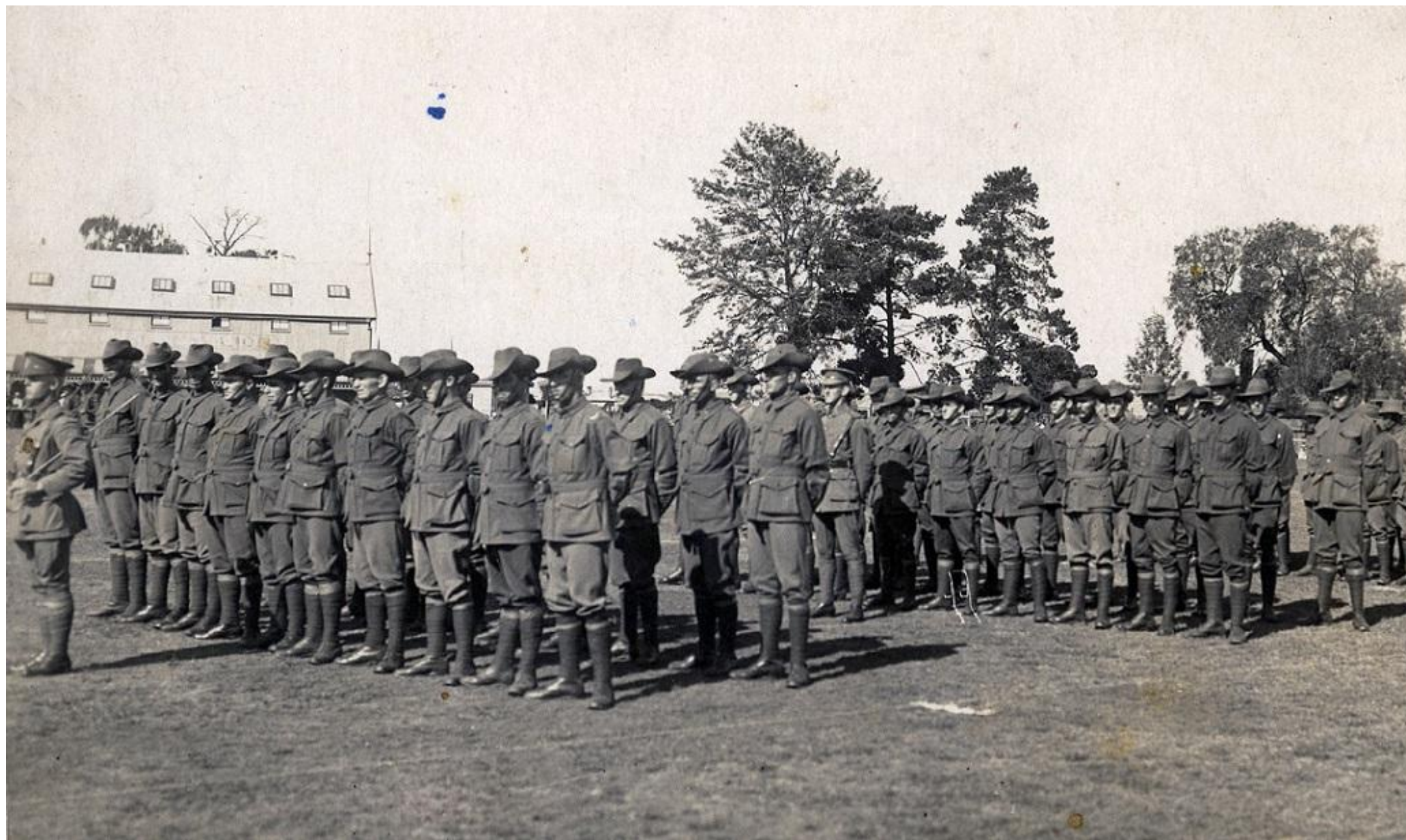
New South Wales, Maitland.

30 April 1916.



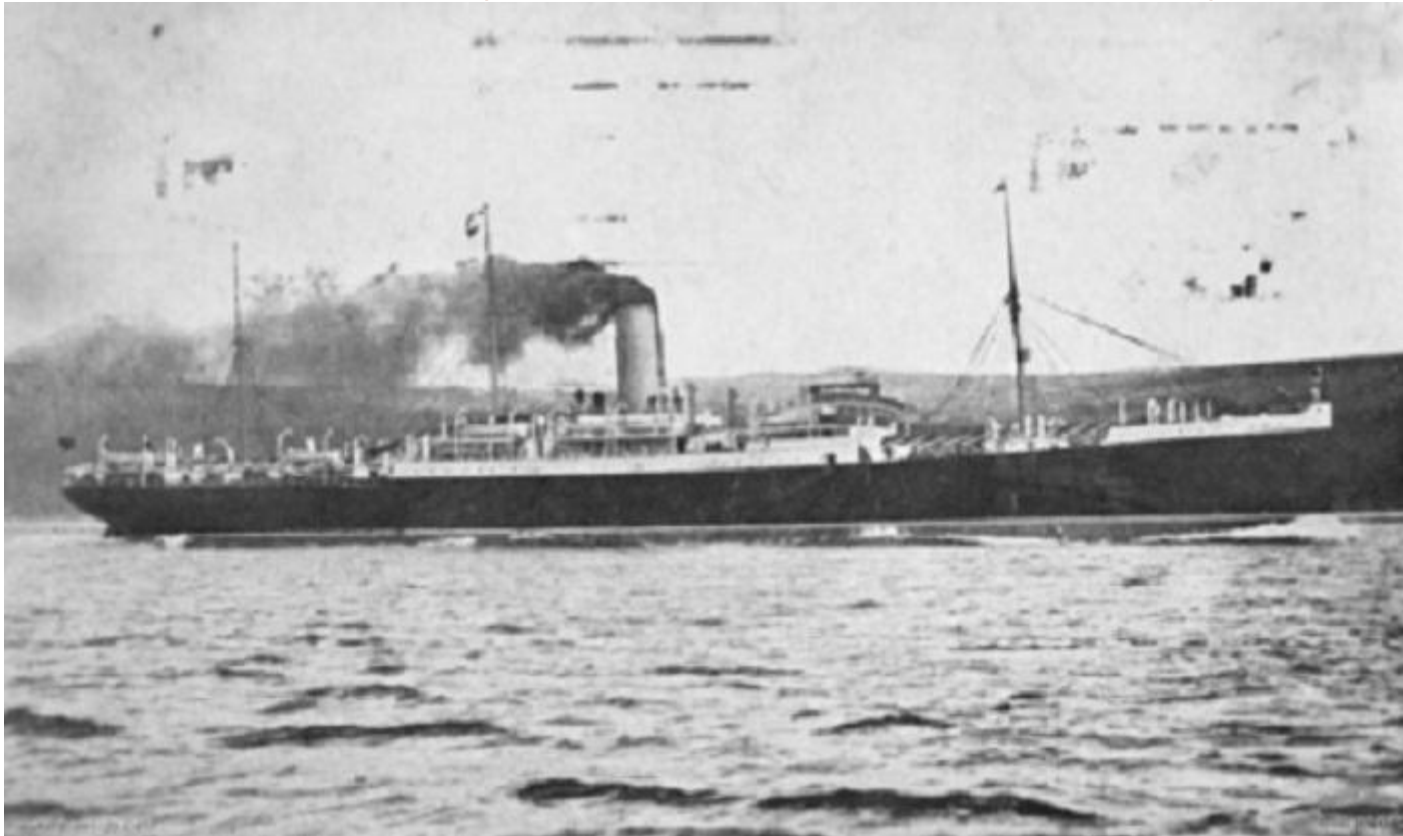
church service
34 Battalion before leaving Martland Camp
for the front
April the 30th 1916.

A church service held by the 34th Battalion before leaving Maitland camp to embark overseas. A Chaplain is conducting the service watched by some civilians. Credit : Australian War Memorial.



34th BATTALION AIF, MAITLAND SHOWGROUND prior to their departure

*On 1st May 1916, the Battalion left by train from Farley Station for the Showground in Sydney, equipped with kit bags and necessary clothing, and was reviewed in Moore Park by **General: Gustave Mario RAMACCOTTI**. On the following morning, 2nd May 1916 the men embarked on the transport HMAT A20 "HORORATA" and sailed at 4:00 pm".*



H.M.A.T. A20 "HORORATA"

"The voyage to England was without any unusual incidents and a good passage throughout. The first port of call was Albany, where three days were spent. Columbo was reached on Empire Day, 24th May. Here two days were taken up coaling and taking on provisions, etc. During the stay the Battalion carried out a route march through the town. Suez was reached on 8th June, where a party of Light Horse and some details were disembarked. Arriving at Port Said on 9th, the ship coaled and proceeded to Alexandria which was reached on 11th June 1916.



Here the Battalion transferred to S.S. "Aragon", E867. Some Australian Details were on board, also a number of Tommy's going to England on Furlough. Devonport was reached on the 23rd June, the Battalion disembarked at Plymouth at 1:00 pm and en trained during the afternoon for Amesbury, arriving at midnight and marching to hutments at No: 1 Camp, Larkhill. Here the Battalion settled down to hard training, which included Route Marching, Trench Digging, Bomb Practice, Musketry and General Camp Routine. Later the Battalion moved to the No: 25 Camp and finished off their training, which included six days' battle practice and field work at the Bustard Trenches.

1916 - 34TH BATTALION ARRIVE IN ENGLAND

We passed on through Salisbury, and after a total run of about six hours detrained at the little station of Amesbury.

A three-miles' march in the gloaming brought us to a city of large wooden huts, which stretch in their thousands over Britain's great training ground - Salisbury Plain.

By Capt.-Chaplain A.A. McCook, of Maitland,
writing from Larkhill, Salisbury Plains Camp, England
9th May, 1916.



34th Battalion marching through Amesbury

Four days' disembarkation leave was given from 6th to 10th July. Whilst here the Official Colours were issued. Purple over Green (Oval), these replacing the Colours presented to the Battalion (Old Gold on Shoulder Straps) by the Ladies of West Maitland. A Signal Section was formed at Larkhill under [Lieutenant: Harold Henry McMINN](#). The weather in England was mostly fine until the latter part of training, when a good deal of rain and snow caused inconvenience. In September the 34th Battalion was reviewed at a Divisional Parade by His Majesty King George V at Bulford.

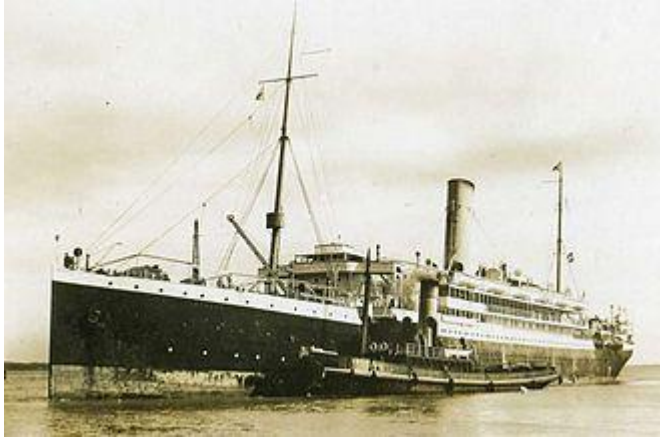
So, as we can see, on 2 May 1916 Walter leaves Sydney on HMAT A20 Hororata, bound for Alexandria.

The Hororata had an interesting history. Owned by the New Zealand Shipping Co Ltd, London and leased by the Commonwealth until 11 Sep 1917. Originally fitted out to serve the New Zealand emigrant trade, with 5 First Class berths and 1066 Steerage Class. She completed six voyages from Australia, the first being from Melbourne with the 6th and 7th Battalion HQs on 18 Oct 1914, and she was a member of the 1st Convoy that left from Albany. From 12 Sep 1917 until 12 Apr 1919 she was under the control of the British Admiralty, having been taken up as part of the Liner Requisition Scheme, continuing to carry troops.

Laid up from August 1930 until Feb 1933. The Hororata then served as a Cadet Training Ship from 1934 to 1939. Sold to the British India Steam Navigation Co Ltd in London, it was renamed *Waronga* before being again requisitioned on 7 Mar 1940 for service with the Liner Requisition Scheme. On 5 Apr 1943 while part of a convoy from New York to London it was torpedoed by U Boat U630, sinking the next day following an explosion. 22 crew were lost.



Walter then boards the Aragon and arrives in Plymouth on 23 June 1916.



HMT *Aragon*, originally **RMS *Aragon***, was a 9,588 [GRT](#)^[1] transatlantic [Royal Mail Ship](#) that served as a troop ship in the First World War. She was built in [Belfast, Ireland](#) in 1905 and was the first of the [Royal Mail Steam Packet Company](#)'s fleet of "A-liners" that worked regular routes between [Southampton](#) and South American ports including [Buenos Aires](#).^[2]

In 1913 *Aragon* became Britain's first [defensively armed merchant ship](#) ("DAMS") of modern times. In the [First World War](#) she served as a troop ship, taking part in the [Gallipoli Campaign](#) in 1915. In 1917, a German submarine sank her in the Mediterranean, killing 610 of the personnel aboard.

On the 2 September 1916 Walter marries Florence May Reid, at All Saints, South Acton in London; she is 10 years his junior. Quite how and where they meet is a mystery, but this was quick work. His banns are read 6/13/20 August 1916 in Durrington, Wiltshire, which must be near his base at the time.

However, from 16 September 1916 he is transferred to the 4th Battalion, 1st Training Battalion initially, and proceeding overseas. The 4th Battalion served at Gallipoli in 1915 and is part of the 1st Brigade in the 1st Division of the AIF.

It is not known why Walter transferred to the 4th Battalion, Jim notes that "it is quite unusual for a man who is 'On Strength' of a Unit to be removed and transferred to another Unit (maybe they could see his feet would be a headache they didn't want to deal with). It's usually the unallotted reinforcements that are shifted about, anyway it happened for whatever reason and so he was transferred to the *1st Training*

Battalion (his records say 1st Training Brigade but at this time it was actually known as a 'Training Battalion' - 'Training Brigades' came about in late 1917). Each Infantry Brigade had a Training Battalion established in England that reinforcements and returning wounded pass through on their way to / from their Units in France/Belgium. There were a lot of changes later in the war whereby a lot of these training establishments were amalgamated and/or restructured due to manpower shortages, but in 1916 it was thus for the 1st & 3rd Divisions:

1st Division:

1st Training Battalion - (1st Brigade) - 1,2,3,4 Battalions

2nd Training Battalion - (2nd Brigade) - 5,6,7,8 Battalions

3rd Training Battalion - (3rd Brigade) - 9,10,11,12 Battalions

3rd Division:

9th Training Battalion - (9th Brigade) - 33,34,35,36 Battalions

10th Training Battalion - (10th Brigade) - 37,38,39,40 Battalions

11th Training Battalion - (11th Brigade) - 41,42,43,44 Battalions

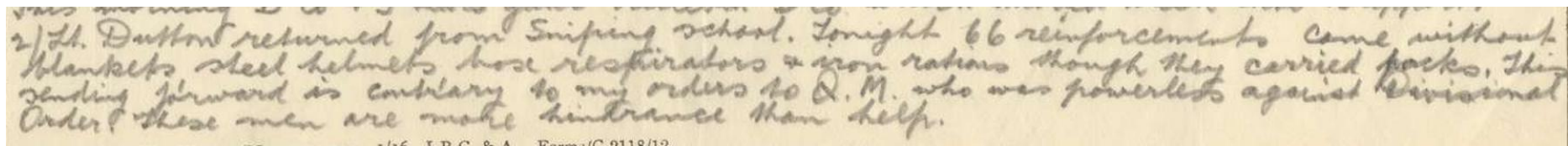
Each of the four Companies within a Training Battalion would administer one of the battalions within their Brigade; e.g.: 1st Tng Bn: 'A' Coy (1st Bn); 'B' Coy (2nd Bn); 'C' Coy (3rd Bn); 'D' Coy (4th Bn).”

If this was followed then it is likely that Walter was in D Company, 1st Training Battalion, 1st Brigade, 1st Division.

Soldiers would remain in the Training Battalion conducting training and being kitted out until called forward to reinforce their Unit.

Infantry Drafts would move forward and on arrival in France would march into their Base Depot. There were 5 Base Depots (numbered 1-5 for each of the Divisions), so being in the 4th Battalion Walter went to the *1st ADBD (1st Australian Division Base Depot)*. Soldiers would usually spend a couple of weeks conducting final training before being Taken on Strength (ToS) of their Battalion; the time in the Base Depots could be shorter or longer depending on the requirements of the Unit. From March 1916 all the Divisional Base Depots were located at Etaples (known to the troops as Eatapples or Heeltaps), then moved to Le Havre (June 1917) and were finally disbanded in December 1917 when replaced by the *Infantry Base Depot* for all infantry of all Divisions.

On 5 November 1916 he is taken on strength to the 4th Battalion “in the field”, having left Etaples on 29 October 1916. This extract of the War Diary is dated for the day before, but Walter may well have been one of the 66. It doesn't appear that this group were welcomed with open arms.



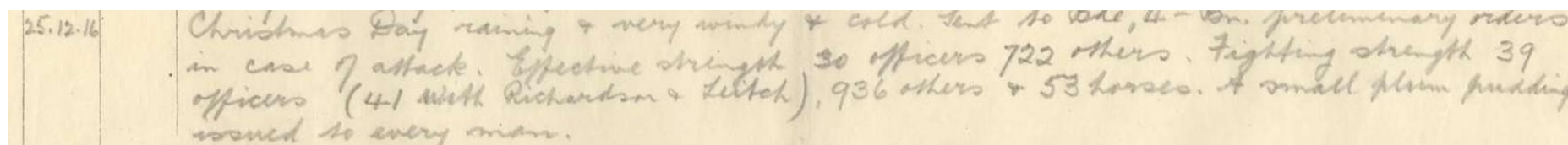
2) Lt. Dutton returned from Sniping school. Tonight 66 reinforcements came without blankets steel helmets hose respirators & iron rations though they carried packs. This sending forward is contrary to my orders to Q. M. who was powerless against Divisional Order? These men are more hindrance than help.

This is when his regimental number might have been amended to 220A (though not recorded in his file until later in 1918) as there was a soldier with that number serving in the same battalion (220 Pte John CRABTREE - originally 'H' Company, 4th Bn - who returned to Australia on 12 May 1918). An 'A' suffix to a regimental number is quite a common occurrence as numbering was replicated in each individual battalion. According to the AIF PROJECT website, there are 67 members of the AIF with the number 220. So, as men moved between Units there was a good chance that their number would already exist and the quick fix was to place an 'A' on the end, sometimes even a third man would join with the same number and so a 'B' would be used.

From the War Diaries we can see that in November 1916 the 4th Battalion were north of Gueudecourt in action and moved to shelters in Delville Wood on the 6th. The 7th was “extremely cold and a windy day with heavy rain. Last night many shelters leaked, others collapsed, and men wet through”. As the month progresses, we can read, “Trenches very wet, narrow and boggy”. “Very wet and miserable weather” and later that month it snowed. The winter of 16/17 was extreme. From Delville they move back through Bernafey Wood, Fricourt Camp, Buire-sur-L’Ancre to Flesselles, via Amiens; the last stage in motor buses, to rest and train. This would have been a part of the normal rotation of soldiers at the front. On 10 November the Battalion comprises 28 officers, 633 other ranks, 56 horses; 55 men are “sick”. It is around this time that Walter writes his Service Card.

On 18 November “snow fell” but “all ranks now have 2 blankets each.” On 21 November a cheque for 31 pounds and 10 shillings was sent to Birmingham for 1,000 nickel match boxes to commemorate the second anniversary of the formation of the 4th Battalion. I wonder where these are now! It would be lovely to find one. On 23 November there is an inspection of box respirators by a Divisional Officer, however on that same day Walter is suffering with “deformed feet / bunions” and goes to hospital “in the field”, and the next day to a New Zealand Casualty Clearing Station by ambulance train. He is discharged from hospital at Etaples on 2 December 1916 to return to his unit.

December takes the Battalion back to the front. To Ribemont by train, where on 3 December there is an inspection by the C.O. of all men (52) in the Battalion with sore feet. I wonder if Walter was one of them? Then to Mametz (Melbourne Camp – “exceedingly muddy and boggy camp with few pathways and drains but with good Nissan huts holding 30 men each”) where Company and Battalion drills are ongoing. Then to Bernafey Wood and the Support Trenches from 21 December, Switch and Gap trenches SE of Flers. On 17 December Christmas gifts from Australia are distributed among the men, but one wonders if Walter would have received anything from the UK? On 19 December 150 partially trained reinforcements arrive. That day a Mills Bomb explodes in a hut, wounding 6 men including 2 CSM’s, 1 Sgt and 3 others. Quite how the bomb got into the brazier is not known! “Snow fell in the afternoon, and the ground froze hard.” On 21 December a drying room was opened near Brigade HQ, which is also to be used as a bootmaker and barber’s shop. On 24 December heavy artillery fire by both sides is reported between 2030 and 2130 and later about midnight. Happy Christmas everyone (no truce this time!).



25.12.16 Christmas Day raining & very windy & cold. Sent to care, 4 - on preliminary orders in case of attack. Effective strength 30 officers 722 others. Fighting strength 39 officers (41 with Richardson & Litch), 936 others & 53 horses. A small plum pudding issued to every man.

Hopefully they will have enjoyed the plum pudding.

The New Year (1917) continues in the trenches and “tunnel dugouts” just north of Gueudecourt. There is mention of an outpost called Fritz’s Folly. Food runs, at this time, at dawn and dusk, are taking 2 hours and are very exhausting. On 3 January 13 are killed and 6 wounded from one artillery shell hitting the Battalion HQ. From the War Diary “Total wastage while in firing line Dec 31 to Jan 7, 14 killed, 23 wounded, inflamed feet to hospital 23 and 55 to hospital other causes”. Inflamed feet are clearly causing problems and may explain Walter’s imminent departure. The Battalion returns to rest via Coolgardie Camp to Ribemont, Contay and Bazentan. Baths at Heilly allow a “clean up and refit generally”.

On 14 January it is snowing, so “no church parade”. On 17 and 18 January training “in new attack formations” is undertaken. At the end of the month the Battalion is back into Support trenches.

Relieved 3rd Bn in Support Trenches - C Coy remained at HIGH WOOD EAST Camp, BTD
Coy 2 to TURKS AVENUE & NORTH ROAD, A Coy in rear of FLERS RESERVE on left. Relief completed
without incident by 19.45. Ltd. Forms/C.2118/13.
R.V. Staer (Maj)
O.C. 4th Aust. Inf. Bn.

On 4 February "16 of our shells fall in our own lines without causing casualties", thankfully. The general sense of activity at this time was fluid front-line management of positions and planning a raid. But the artillery were busy, albeit with questionable accuracy, and had dispersed an enemy working party. On 12 February "the band played for the first time".



TO THE OFFICERS AND COMMANDERS
SERGEANTS AND MEN OF THE
**FIRST
AUSTRALIAN
DIVISION**
WHO FOUGHT IN
FRANCE AND BELGIUM
1916 - 1917 - 1918

À LA MÉMOIRE
DES OFFICIERS, CHEFS DE COMPAGNIE, SERGEANTS ET
PREMIÈRE DIVISION AUSTRALIENNE
QUI ONT COMBATTU EN FRANCE ET EN BELGIQUE
1916 - 1917 - 1918

This is a picture of the First Australian Division Memorial at Pozieres taken by myself last summer (2025).

Maybe because of his medical condition, from 13 February 1917 Walter is on his way back to England on detachment for permanent Base Duties, via the *1st Australian Division Base Depot*. On 17 February 1917 he joins No.2 Command Depot, Weymouth. These extracts are taken from their War Diary for April 1917, but Walter leaves just before Anzac Day:

ENTERTAINMENTS.-

The Concerts and Cinema Shows given weekly in the Camp have been well attended.

"ANZAC DAY" - 25th April.-

This was commemorated by a Memorial Service. There was a Football Match, followed by Matinee Performances in the Pavilion Theatre and Jubilee Hall, which were very much appreciated by the men. Concerts and Cinema Entertainments were given in the evening at the Gymnasium and Y.M.C.A. Hut at Monte Video Camp and Verne Citadel.

10. GENERAL.

The cleanliness of the Camp is very well maintained, and the latrines are now in good order and thoroughly clean.

The Water Supply has had to be cut down on account of overconsumption, and the water is now only turned on between 7 am and 9 am., 12 noon and 2 pm., and 5 pm. and 7 pm. This is the cause of a great deal of inconvenience, and is likely to affect the sanitary arrangements.

The windmill in the centre of the camp pumps the water to the top, and as there is now not sufficient wind to force a sufficient quantity of water to the Married Quarters, the shortage is being seriously felt.

A leakage is suspected, but has not yet been discovered.

The Pioneers and the Sanitary Squad carry out their duties very efficiently.

Particular attention is being paid to the cleanliness of the Cookhouses, and the Officers concerned have been made personally responsible for the cleanliness of the Cookhouses under their charge. No clothing is allowed to be kept there.

Frank Harrison

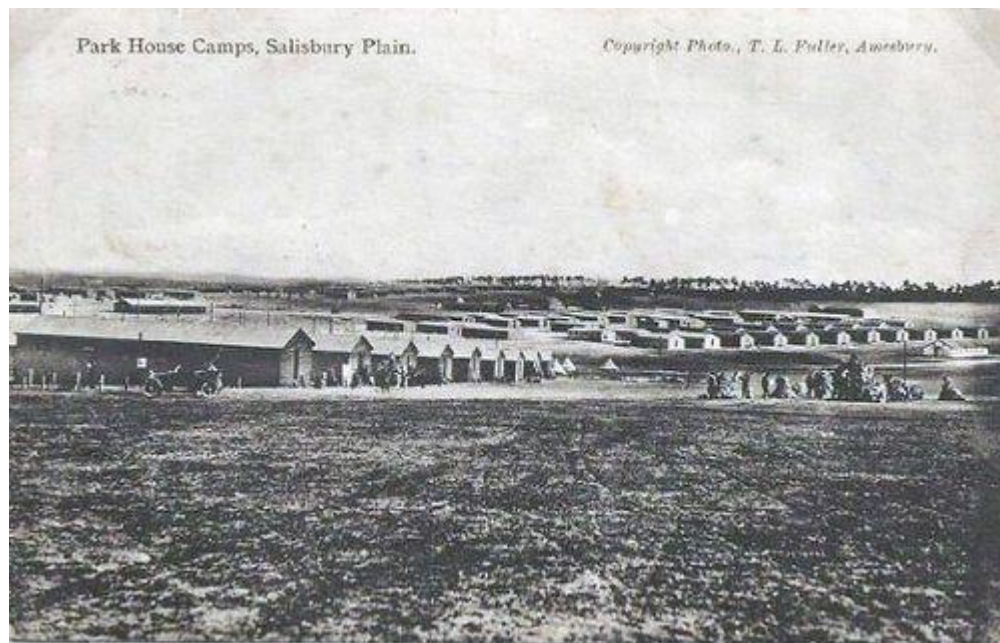
On 21 April 1917 he moves to Parkhouse, No.3 Camp, from No.2 Command Depot. But quite what his role and responsibilities are is unclear.

The Army Service Corps, Engineers, Signallers and Army Medical Corps were all located at the Parkhouse depot which was situated close to Tidworth. The Bulford hospital was over the other side of the hill.

While the AASC used camp number 4, the Army Medical Corps Training Depot was housed at camp Number 2.

The AASC Training Depot at Parkhouse was a particularly busy establishment. The depot not only trained and despatched 150 ASC reinforcements per month and conducted specialist officer and NCO training, it was also responsible for providing the supplies, transport and barracks services support for the AIF in the UK. Taking into account the AIF HQ, several hospitals, units of AFC and AIF depot complex, Parkhouse was responsible, on top of its training commitment, for the housing, feeding and transporting of about 50,000 men at any given time.

The school itself was set up with a transport and a supply wing, training about 150 reinforcements and reassignments a month, feeding them through the base support role for practical experience as well as manning the structure.



On 8 May 1917 he is detached to the Anzac Provost Corp at Bhurtpore Barracks, Tidworth. Looking at the entry criteria this must be seen as a good move for Walter.

3. PERSONNEL:

TOTAL.

8

378

The greatest care has, at all times, been exercised in selecting men for military police duties, and it is an inflexible condition that all candidates for admission to the Corps must have

ALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

RCDIG1003572

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-2-

3. PERSONNEL - (Continued).

clean records, be of good physique, and must, at some time or other, have seen service in a combatant unit in active operations against the enemy in the field, and certainly there is no member who has not seen service in active operations against the enemy, either in Gallipoli or France, or both, and many of them are wearing decorations for gallantry, besides good conduct and wounded stripes.

All men transferred to the Australian Provost Corps in the United Kingdom undergo a period of preparatory training, before their transfer to the Corps is finally approved. In the first instance they are stationed at the Headquarters of the unit for a period of from two to four weeks, and during that time are given a course of instruction in military police duties. During this period they are kept under close observation, and every point considered in determining whether or not they are temperamentally and otherwise suited for, and likely to become proficient in military police duties.



4.

MEDICAL CLASSIFICATION:

All members of the Corps, actually engaged on Police work, are of category "A" in order that they may be exchanged from time to time with the overseas personnel.

However, on 22 May 1917 he is admitted to Lakenham Military Hospital, for 'PUO' which is Pyrexia of Unknown Origin, this is a fever that lasts for a prolonged period.

Also, around this time his paybook (No. 87227) is amended to pay 4 shillings to his wife with effect from 12 January 1917.

In June 1917 he is recorded as performing guard duties in London.

On 25 October 1917 disaster strikes. He forfeits 2 days' pay for the following offence; "London. Without reasonable excuse allowing to escape a person committed to his charge whom it was his duty to guard".

6.

ESCORTING:

This work entails the permanent employment of probably 70 men of the Australian Provost Corps. Until August, 1917, the various units supplied their own escorts for men arrested throughout the United Kingdom for absence, and other offences, but this system was found to be unsatisfactory, in so far as escapes became so frequent that the G.O.C., A.I.F. Depots in U.K. directed that, in future, the whole of the escorting should be done by the military police. The new system has, for the past eight months worked almost without a single complaint.

I attach hereto a Table marked "D" shewing the number of cases dealt with by the Military Police (not necessarily arrests) covering the period from 1st. JANUARY, 1917 to 31st. DECEMBER, 1918, together with the number of cases dealt with by Court Martial in the United Kingdom for the same period. This will give some idea of the volume of work done by the Australian Provost Corps.

12.

INTERNAL DISCIPLINE:

Serious breaches of discipline on the part of members of the Corps are, as might be expected, practically non-existent. Any offences, however, are dealt with, with exemplary rigour, and, in most cases, the offender is removed from the Corps. Such occurrences are, as stated above, very rarely met with.

Here you can see the record of Walter's lapse:



A U S T R A L I A N P R O V O S T C O R P S .

S U M M A R Y O F C A S E S D E A L T W I T H F O R 2 Y E A R S E N D I N G 3 1 s t . D E C E M B E R , 1 9 1 8 .

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OFFENCE	SIX MONTHS ENDING 30.6.1917.	SIX MONTHS ENDING 31.12.1917	SIX MONTHS ENDING 30.6.1918	SIX MONTHS ENDING 31.12.1918.	T O T A L .
ABSENCE -----	7232	6367	6086	6205	25890
DRUNKENNESS -----	656	400	161	180	1397
INSUBORDINATION -----	118	32	23	10	183
CONDUCT TO PREJUDICE -----	949	746	401	539	2635
RESISTING ARREST -----	104	51	45	61	261
ESCAPING FROM CUSTODY-----	82	33	17	44	176
DISOBEDIENCE -----	303	90	109	17	519
NEGLECT TO OBEY -----	1906	3474	2463	1980	9823
LARCENY -----	48	30	11	15	104
FORGED PASS -----	240	263	78	26	607
ASSAULT -----	48	20	12	59	139
BOUNDS -----	321	17	33	17	388
FAILING TO SALUTE -----	580	407	290	168	1445
BREACH OF TRAFFIC -----	20	51	15	3	89
DESERTION -----	17	20	99	92	228
ALLOWING TO ESCAPE -----	41	1	-	-	42
IMPROPERLY DRESSED-----	31	249	70	160	510
STRIKING SUPERIOR-----	17	18	4	6	45
ALTERED PAYBOOK -----	16	-	13	7	36
TRESPASSING -----	41	71	94	128	334
TRAFFICKING IN GOVT.STORES	1	5	8	3	17
NO MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION	-	-	22	35	57
TOTALS.	12,771	12,345	10,054	9,755	44,925

However, further information from the archives reveals more of the details and context.

On 25th October 1917 Walter is marched out and struck off the strength of the APC London detachment; his officer is furious.



27th October, 7

Headquarters,
Anzac Provost Corps,
Tidworth.

Re No. 220, Pte. Wheldon. W., 4th Battalion.

In reply to your CR AIF 5766 PM of the 26th instant, I beg to advise that the above man is being returned to you under escort to-day. Summary of evidence, having been duly completed, is attached, together with A.F.B. 252 and signed statements by W.O. Hawkins and Sgt. Wilmott.

I wish to strongly recommend, irrespective of any award that he receives, that this man be removed from any further connection with the Anzac Provost Corps, as this man was the sentry on duty in the early morning of the 30th August last when seven prisoners succeeded in making their escape from the Guard Room at this address. Further comment is needless. The two prisoners who escaped on this occasion are No. 4308, Pte. E.C. White, 9th Battalion and No. 2973, Pte. E. Southwood, 4th Battalion. Every effort is being made with a view to their early apprehension, and on the receipt of further information, you will be notified accordingly.

Regarding these.

H
A.F.M., A.I.F.,
London.

However, the events listed here don't tie up. White and Southward did indeed escape, as we shall see, but not with 5 others on the 30th August.

Summary of evidence in the case of No.220, Private W.Wheldon,
4th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, attached Anzac
Provost Corps, London.

.....

1st Witness for
the Prosecution.

No. 426. Sgt G.Wilmott, 1st Divisional Train, A.S.C., attached
to Anzac Provost Corps, 51 Warwick Square, London, states:-

I recognise the Accused. I was on duty as Sergt. of
the Guard at 51 and 52 Warwick Square, London. at 9.30 a.m.
on the 24th of Oct. 1917 until 9.30 a.m. on the 25th of Oct.
1917. The accused was a member of my Guard. He was posted
from 6 a.m. on the 26th inst. to 8 a.m. same date. He reported
to me at 6.25 a.m. on the 25th inst. two prisoners had escaped
from No. 9.Cell. He stated he had allowed them out of the
Cell to wash, when they had escaped. He also stated that he
had allowed 4 prisoners out at the time that the two had escaped.
I then checked the prisoners and found that No. 4308. Pte.
White, C.E. 9th Ntm. A.I.F. and No. 2973. Pte Southward. E.
were missing from No. 9.Cell. I made a thorough search of
the whole building and could find no trace of these two
prisoners. I then relieved Pte. Weldon from duty and placed
him under arrest and reported the matter to the A.P.M.

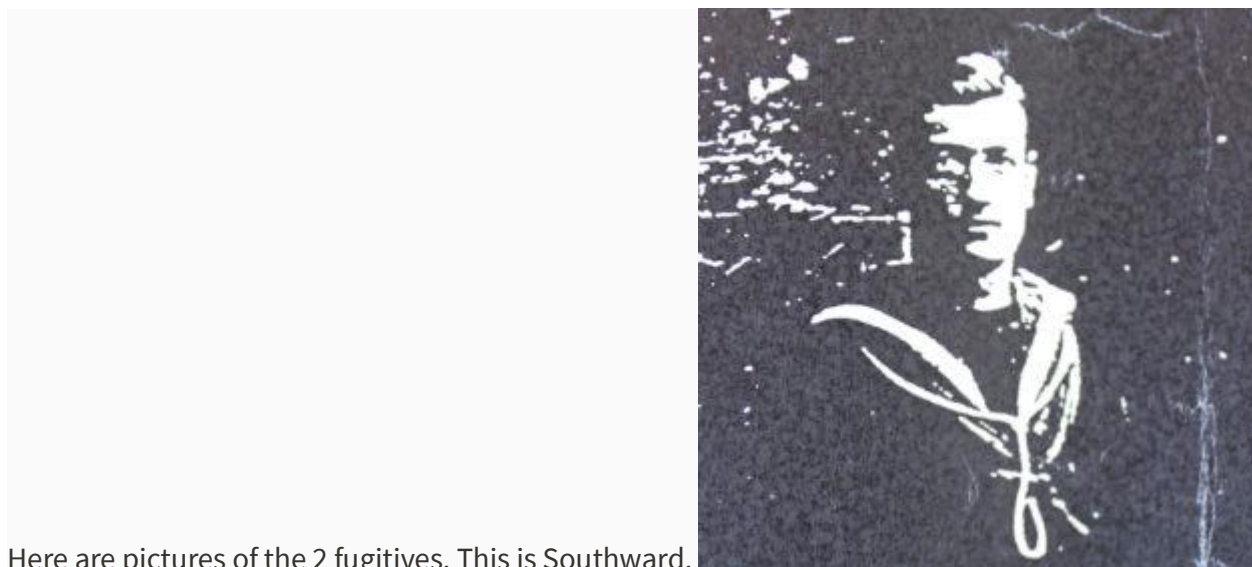
During my tour of duty as Sergt. of the Guard I
visited the Sentries every two hours and found they were alert
and conversant with their orders.

The accused's post as Sentry was in No 52 Warwick Sq.
He had charge of the keys of Nos 8 & 9 Cells in 52 Warwick Square
and according to the written orders read out when my Guard
mounted should not have allowed more than two prisoners out
at the same time for any purpose whatsoever. The accused was
present when these orders were read out.

(Sgd) G.WILMOTT. Sgt.

The accused declines to Cross Examine this witness.

Walter declined to make a statement in his defence.



Here are pictures of the 2 fugitives. This is Southward.



Here is White.

From Ancestry we can learn a little more of these two characters.

Enoch William Southward, 2973, was born in Uralla, NSW, Australia in 1892. A Labourer, he enlisted on 29 July 1915. He dies on 25 October 1943, an Assistant Inspector of Stock, and is buried in Lutwyche Cemetery, Kedron, Queensland, Australia. May he rest in peace.

From his military file, this is a helpful summary of his service.

PRECIS OF SERVICE OF NO. 2973 Pte. E. W. SOUTHWARD. 4/Bn.

For the information of the Medal Board.

30. 9.15 Embarked for active service.,
~~16. 2.16 Transferred to 56/Battalion from 4/Battalion.~~
24. 2.16 Transferred from 56/Battalion from to 4/Battalion.
23. 3.16 Embarked at Alexandria for o/seas and dis-embarked
Marseilles on 30.3.16.
17. 8.16 Wounded in action.
19. 1.17 Rejoined 4/Battalion.
28. 7.17 Proceeded on leave to U. K.
9. 8.17 A. W. L.
15.10.17 Apprehended.
25.10.17 Escaped from detention, and declared an illegal
absentee.
9. 9.19 Apprehended.
9.10.19 D. C. M. held in London. Charge:- (1). A. W. L.
from 9.8.17 until 15.10.17. (2). A. W. L. from
25.10.17 until he enlisted in the Royal Naval
Reserve in Dublin 16.3.18. Found Guilty of both
charges and sentenced to 120 days detention.
1.11.19 Embarked for R. T. A. unexpired portion of sentence
remitted.
15.12.19 Dis-embarked 3rd M. D.
16.12.19 Discharged 2nd M. D. S. N. L. R.

Being in the 4th Battalion it may be possible that he was known to Walter. Sadly his conduct led to a forfeiture of any medals.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your communication of 6th September, 1932, I am forwarding herewith the Discharge Certificate in respect of your service as No. 2973 of the 4th Battalion.

The Standing Medal Board has ruled that on account of your unsatisfactory service in the A.I.F. you have forfeited all rights to the award of War Medals.

Yours faithfully,



Officer i/c Base Records.

Mr. E.W. Southward,
4, Lanham Street,
Bowen Hills,
BRISBANE. Q'land.

Encl. *R.P.N. 11*



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13/9/32

His return to Australia was recorded thus. You can draw your own conclusions here, but he did fight and was wounded!

BENDEMEER WELCOME HOME.

There was a large gathering at the Bendemeer Hall on the 31st January, when the residents of Bendemeer and district, gave a welcome home to Pte. Enoch Southward, who had been on active service for a number of years, and was the last soldier to return home to this district. The hall wore a gay appearance, as it usually does, on such occasions, being draped with battalion colors, and supper tables prettily decorated. As the soldier entered the hall Miss R. Blair played "Home Sweet Home," and hearty cheers were given, Miss Marjorie Osborne afterwards singing: "Coming Home." Mr. A. Osborne (chair), extended a welcome to Pte. Southward and presented him with a gold medal, suitably inscribed from the residents of Bendemeer and district.

The presentation of a gold ring set with battalion colors was made on behalf of the "Girls' Patriotic League," by the president Miss Iris O'Toole. Addresses were also delivered by Messrs. R. D. and J. Dixon, to which the young soldier suitably responded. Mrs. W. Blair was asked to accept a gold medal for her son, Pte. Gordon Blair, from the residents, and a gold ring from the "G.P. League." Mrs. Blair responded on behalf of her son, who is at present in Queensland. Pte E. Brerton, Gunner F. S. McGinty and Gunner L. R. L. McGinty, who arrived home a short time ago, were also asked to be present for reception, but were unavoidably absent. The two latter reside in Sydney and Wellington.

The usual toasts were honored. Refreshments were served and a musical programme and dancing brought the evening to a close.

Cyril Emanuel White, 4308, however, is more of a serial offender. Born in Nyngan, NSW, Australia on 26 April 1894. A car mechanic / fitter, he enlisted on 1 December 1915, or maybe in October 1915 under number 3758, since there are two enlistment documents on his file. Like Walter he also marries when in the UK, to Georgina Smart from Lancashire. He dies on 24 November 1937 in Brisbane, Australia. May he rest in peace.

White's service summary makes interesting reading.

PRECIS OF SERVICE OF No. 4308 Pte. C.E. WHITE, 9/Btn.

For the information of the Medal Board

3.	1.16	Embarked for active service.
14.	2.16	Disembarked Egypt.
29.	3.16	Proc. to join B.E.F.
4.	4.16	Disembarked Marseilles.
13.	10.16	A.W.L.
17.	1.17	Apprehended.
19.	1.17	A.W.L.
2.	8.17	Apprehended
13.	8.17	A.W.L.
3.	9.17	Apprehended.
30.	9.17	A.W.L.
30.	9.17	Apprehended.
25.	10.17	A.W.L.
19.	12.17	Declared illegal absentee.
21.	7.20	Discharged in consequence of illegal absence.

AUTOMATICALLY FORFEITS

awls

This might help to explain why White was keen to abscond that morning.

COURTS-MARTIAL.

Form of Order for the assembly of a General or District Court-Martial.

Routine Orders by Col. T. Griffiths C.M.G., D.S.O.,

Commanding the Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F.

(Place and Date) London 23-10-17.

The detail of officers as mentioned below will assemble at 59 Warwick Square on the 25th. day of October 1917. for the purpose of trying by a District court-martial the accused person [persons] named in the margin [and such other person or persons as may be brought before them].*

PRESIDENT.

Lieut. Col. G. Coulter, D.S.O., is appointed President, †
8th. Bn. A.I.F. MEMBERS.

Captain A.S. Vowles, D.S.O., 12th. Battalion A.I.F.

Captain A.R. MacNeil, 81st. Battalion, A.I.F.

Note.—The President must be named. The Members and the waiting members may be mentioned by name, or the number and ranks and the unit† to which they belong may alone be named.

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WAITING MEMBERS.

Lieut. W.H. Frier, 1st. Battalion A.I.F.

No. 4308 Private Cyril Emanuel WHEE, 9th. Battalion, A.I.F.

The charge sheet provides the details.

CHARGE SHEET

The ACCUSED, No. 4308 Private Cyril Emanuel WHITE, 9th. Battalion,
a soldier of the Australian Imperial Force, is charged with:-

1st. Charge. WHEN ON ACTIVE SERVICE,
Section 12(1)a. DESERTING HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE,
Army Act.

in that he,

at Etaples, France, on the 13th. October 1917, absented himself
without leave from the 1st. Australian Divisional Base Depot,
until arrested by the Military Authorities at Etaples on the
17th. January 1917.

2nd. Charge. WHEN ON ACTIVE SERVICE,
Section 12(1)a. DESERTING HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE,
Army Act.

in that he,

at Etaples, France, on the 19th. January 1917 escaped from
the Field Punishment Compound and remained absent without leave
until arrested by the Civil Power at LONDON on the 2nd. August 1917.

CONDUCT TO THE PREJUDICE OF GOOD ORDER
AND MILITARY DISCIPLINE.

in that he,

3rd. Charge. at London, on the 2nd. August 1917 was improperly in possession
Section 40. of two official rubber stamps.
Army Act.

4th. Charge. WHEN ON ACTIVE SERVICE,
Section 12(1)a. DESERTING HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE,
Army Act.

in that he,

at Bulford, on the 13th. August 1917, escaped from the 1st.
Australian Dermatological Hospital, while a prisoner awaiting
trial, and remained absent without leave until arrested in
civilian clothes at Liverpool by the Civil Power on the 3rd.
September 1917.

5th. Charge. WHEN IN CONFINEMENT ESCAPING,
Section 23.
Army Act.

in that he,

at London, on the 30th. September 1917, when in confinement at
Rochester Row Police Station, London, escaped.

LONDON. Major,
October 23rd, 1917. G.C. Australian Troops in LONDON.



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TO BE TRIED BY D. C. M.

T. J. P. H.
COLONEL.

Both prior to and post war, White has an extensive criminal record. Assaults in 1908 and 1910. Armed robbery in 1912 for which he is jailed for 3 years. GBH in 1920, for which he is found not guilty but detained on grounds of insanity, and failing to support his wife and family in 1929; eventually resolved. Finally a drink driving offence in 1929 when using the alias of Kenneth Kennedy. Quite an eventful life!

Vide Police Gazette, 1920, page 508.

Lismore.—A Bench warrant has been issued by His Honor Judge White for the arrest of Cyril Emanuel White for failing to appear at Lismore Quarter Sessions on the 23rd November, 1920, to answer to a charge of maliciously wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm. Offender is 26 years of age, 5 feet 10 or 11 inches high, medium, active build, fresh complexion, clean shaved, hazel eyes, long, thin features, Roman nose; talks quickly; a motor-driver or cycle mechanic, and a returned soldier. Said to be about Brisbane. Identical with offender same name (vide above reference, and Photo.-book No. 70, page 88).

Up to his old tricks again.

Darlinghurst.—Two warrants have been issued by the Children's Court Bench for the arrest of CYRIL EMANUEL WHITE, first charged with disobeying a magisterial order for the support of his wife (£40 8s. 6d.); and second a commitment warrant for £17 13s. 6d. (which includes £15 probable costs of escort) and 3s. 6d. costs, in default, 21 days imprisonment, for costs due upon the same order. He is 34 years of age, 6 feet high, thin build, fair complexion, dark hair turning grey, blue eyes, thin drawn features, scar on right side of forehead, birth-mark on chest, small mouth, artificial teeth, tooth on one side of upper plate gold capped; usually dressed in grey clothes; may be employed as a photographer at side shows, and is said to be travelling in a Ford car bearing Queensland number plate Q118-300.

Commitment warrant for £59 10s. and 12s.

And now we return to Walter. I do wonder if, despite his mistake, Walter could have made the case that these were serial escapers in mitigation. But then again he did appear to give them an excellent opportunity and presumably their records were known.

Walter then moves to No.4 Command Depot, Hurdcott via Tidworth, where camps 9, 10, 11 and 12 were occupied.

On 2 December 1917 there is a query, likely from Base Records (Melbourne), about his number, 220. The pencil entry beneath entry number '24' on his records reads: "Queried H.Q. Tidworth re Soldier's Regimental No." Jim is of the opinion that it has been discovered back in Australia that there were two members of the same unit with the same number and because they hadn't been informed of a change of number for one of the men the question has been asked. Base Records was the central administrative HQ in Australia where duplicate records were maintained, and virtually all notifications relating to a soldier were also kept as many entries would affect a man's pay, allotments and later pensions etc.

In December voting commenced in connection with the Commonwealth Referendum on Conscription.

On Christmas Day a leather pocket wallet was presented to each man in the Depot by the Australian YMCA. The menu for the day makes interesting reading.

NO 4 CO HAND DEPT

Nos. 9, 10, 11 & 12 Camps Hurdeott

MENU FOR CHRISTMAS DAY 1917

BREAKFAST

Porridge, Golden Syrup, Fresh Milk
Savoury Rissoles & Gravy, Washed Potatoes
Marmalade, Bread, Margarine
Coffee.

DINNER

Roast stuffed Goose, Turkey, & Chicken, Brown Gravy
Roast Pork & Apple Sauce
Baked Potatoes, Baked Parsnips, Boiled Carrots
Plum Pudding, Brandy Sauce
Walnuts, Brazil Nuts, Almonds & Raisins
Fresh Apples
Sweets
English Beer, Lemonade, Ginger Ale, Lime Juice & Soda

TEA

English Ham, Beetroot Salad
Bread, Margarine, Raspberry Jam
Mixed Fruit Jelly
Christmas Fruit Cake, Jam & Custard Tarts
Ceylon Tea

For December 1917 the average number on the daily sick parade was 41. There were 117 cases of VD for the month.

On 30 January 1918, 9 soldiers under the age of 17 and three quarters were marched out of camp for return to Australia.

Interesting to see what was being grown at the camp.

Particulars of land under cultivation at end February 1918:-

	acres	roods	perches
Potatoes.....	69	-	-
Beetroot.....	-	2	20
Carrots.....	1	2	-
Parsnips.....	1	2	-
White Turnips.....	1	2	1
Swede Turnips.....	11	-	-
Onions.....	-	2	20
Celery.....	-	-	20
Spring Cabbage.....	-	3	10
Cauliflower.....	-	2	25
Brussels Sprouts....	1	-	15
French Beans.....	-	3	24
Spinach.....	-	2	13
Lettuce.....	-	1	16
Kale.....	1	-	15
Vegetable marrow....	3	-	-
Shallots.....	-	2	-
Artichokes.....	1	2	-
Broad Beans.....	2	-	25
Runner beans.....	-	2	30
Peas.....	-	2	28
Pumpkins and melons.	10	-	-
		<hr/>	<hr/>
	<u>TOTAL: 109</u>	3	32.

And how the troops were entertained and what was manufactured.

Entertainments held during December 1917.
4th...Tom Copelands Party.
5th...Miss Lena Ashwell's Party.
6th...The Cooees "Eugene Conjurer".
8th...High Jinks Party.
11th...Matthews Party.
12th...Depot Entertainers.
18th..."Eccentrics"
19th...Depot Entertainers and Miss Lena.Ashwell's Party.
22nd...Tom Copeland's Party.
24th...Australis.
25th...Depot Entertainers.
26th...Globe trotters.
27th...Hurley's Jesters.
29th...Miss Winchester's Party.
31st...Cooees.
Quantity of margarine made at the Depot. during month....1800 lbs.
Quantity of jam made at the Depot. during month....4800 lbs.

All this time he has served as a Private, but on 1 January 1918 he is appointed (not promoted) EDP Corporal on the permanent cadre No.4 Command Depot. An EDP Cpl is an Extra Duty Pay Cpl which is a temporary promotion while in a Training Unit or Depot, as they didn't have enough NCOs to fill all the positions.

From the War Diary, here is a good overview of the No.4 Command Depot.

47
No. 4 COMMAND DEPOT. HURDCOTT. ~~11~~ 4

History of Depot from inception - 26.10.1916 - to
end of February, 1918.
-----0-----

No. 4 Command Depot, A.I.F., was established at the Worgret Hill Camp, Wareham, on 26-10-16. This depot was formed for the purpose of receiving those men from Hospitals and Convalescent Camps whom it was considered would be fit for service at the Front within three months. It was, however, found necessary at a very early stage to receive all classes of unfit men at this Depot; consequently, the Depot handled and treated men who were eventually marched out (a) for return to Australia (b) to the Overseas Drafting Depot, Perham Down, for training for further service at the Front.

On the establishment of the Depot, 11 Officers and 1,500 Other Ranks, (under the Command of Major J. Newman, 11th Battalion) arrived from No.1 Command Depot, Perham Down, and some 600 men were moved to No.4 Command Depot from a temporary camp at Bovington, Wool.

In November, 1916, Lt.Col. S.R.Roberts, D.S.O., 11th Battalion, was appointed Commandant.

In December, 1916, the Depot had grown to a strength of some 7,000 men, and it maintained this strength until March, 1917.

On 17th March, 1917, all men in the Depot fit for graduated training were transferred to the 16th Infantry Brigade, then in course of formation, and this Brigade took possession of four of the Depot Camps, leaving the Command Depot to occupy the Camps on the Southern side of the main Worgret/Wareham road. At the same time, a large draft of men was sent from No.4 Command Depot to form the new No.3 Command Depot at Hurdcott, and these moves reduced the strength of the Depot to approximately 1,700 men. In connection with the formation of the 16th Infantry Brigade, the Command Depot continued to act as a feeder and was able to supply quite a large number of men to complete the personnel of this Brigade.

Anzac Day was celebrated with a combined church service in the morning and a sports meeting in the afternoon.

At the end of June there was “a good deal of sickness due to influenza”.

The Sports Carnival was held on 6 July.

... PROGRAMME ...
OF
GRAND OPEN
SPORTS CARNIVAL

No. 4 Command Depot, A.I.F., Burdecott.
ON SATURDAY, JULY 6th, 1918.

PRESIDENT.

LIEUT.-COL. F. G. WOODS, Commandant No. 4 Command Depot.

PATRONS.

LIEUT.-GEN. SIR R. E. W. TURNER, V.C., C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O.,
G.O.C., Canadian Forces in British Isles.
MAJOR-GEN. THE HON. SIR J. W. McCAY, K.C.M.G., C.B., V.D.,
G.O.C., A.I.F., Depots in United Kingdom.
BRIG.-GEN. G. S. RICHARDSON, C.B., C.M.G., G.O.C., New Zealand
Expeditionary Forces in United Kingdom.
CAPT. A. J. MACELROY, C.O., No. 7 Group, R.A.F., American Troops.

OFFICIALS.

JUDGES. TUG-OF-WAR.

MAJOR S. V. SHEA. CAPT. R. J. SKINNER, M.C.
CAPT. G. K. SATCHELL. LIEUT. J. TODD, M.C.

BOXING.

AN INTERNAL REPRESENTATIVE. CAPT. H. B. FERGUSON.

CALL STEWARDS.

CAPT. G. A. F. SMITH. C. S. M. BELLION.

SCALE STEWARDS.

LIEUT. J. T. STAPLETON. PTE. W. SCOTT.

TRACK EVENTS.

CAPT. F. ANDERSON, M.C. LIEUT. S. J. CHAPMAN, M.C.
CAPT. E. D. F. KEMP. LIEUT. H. H. COLLINS.
MR. S. WHITNEY.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

MAJOR E. B. G. RILEY. CAPT. G. K. SATCHELL.
LIEUT. S. J. CHAPMAN, M.C.

RECEPTION COMMITTEE.

MAJOR E. B. G. RILEY. LIEUT. J. T. STAPLETON, D.C.M.
MAJOR W. J. ROWLANDS. LIEUT. H. H. DE BOUREL.
CHAP. CAPT. G. S. RICHMOND. LIEUT. I. B. THOMPSON.
CHAP. CAPT. F. FOX. LIEUT. J. E. B. MACLEAN.

STARTERS.

MAJOR E. T. J. KERRY. W. O. J. RUIB.

TIMEKEEPERS.

LIEUT. H. G. MURRAY. LIEUT. W. G. GROSE.

TRANSPORT OFFICER.

LIEUT. J. FRANCIS.

RESULT STEWARD.

PTK. PRICE.

CAPT. A. S. ISAAC. } *Jo ut*
SERGT. H. S. GORHAM. } *Has, sec.*

The administrative entries of 30 September / 1 October 1918 remove Walter (known as Struck off Strength) from the 4th Battalion and to permanently Take on Strength of No.4 Command Depot. He is then appointed a Temporary Corporal (T/Cpl) - not a Lance Corporal - Temporary appointments are similar to EDP but are used to fill in a specific Corporal's position within No.4 Command Depot rather than a random position.

On 18 October in camp the epidemic of bronchial pneumonia is still going strong.

On 1 November 1918, so just ahead of the Armistice, he is promoted to Temporary Company Quartermaster Sergeant. Following the departure of 461 T/CQMS John McEwin who was transferred out on 29 October 1918.

On 9 December 1918 he returns to Australia on the Leicestershire, leaving, I believe, his pregnant wife and son behind in England.

" 9..	H.T. "LEICESTERSHIRE" sailed from Liverpool with 69 Officers, 8 Nurses, 154 Warrant Officers and Sgts., 823 Other Ranks = Total personnel 1,054	See app. B.
	H.T. "ARGYLLSHIRE" sailed from Liverpool with 45 Officers, 3 Nurses, 50 Warrant Officers and Sgts. 1,112 Other Ranks = Total personnel 1,210	See app. B.

Harold is born on 16 June 1919, and was baptised on 13 August 1922. His "father" is described in the baptismal record as a "Stationery Engine Driver", but whether that relates to Walter is unknown.

Walter is discharged from the Army on 4 March 1919, medically unfit.

Quite what happens thereafter is very much unknown, however in September 1923, under the alias George Hall (note the surname chosen) he is found guilty on two counts of theft and sentenced to 6 months hard labour in total.

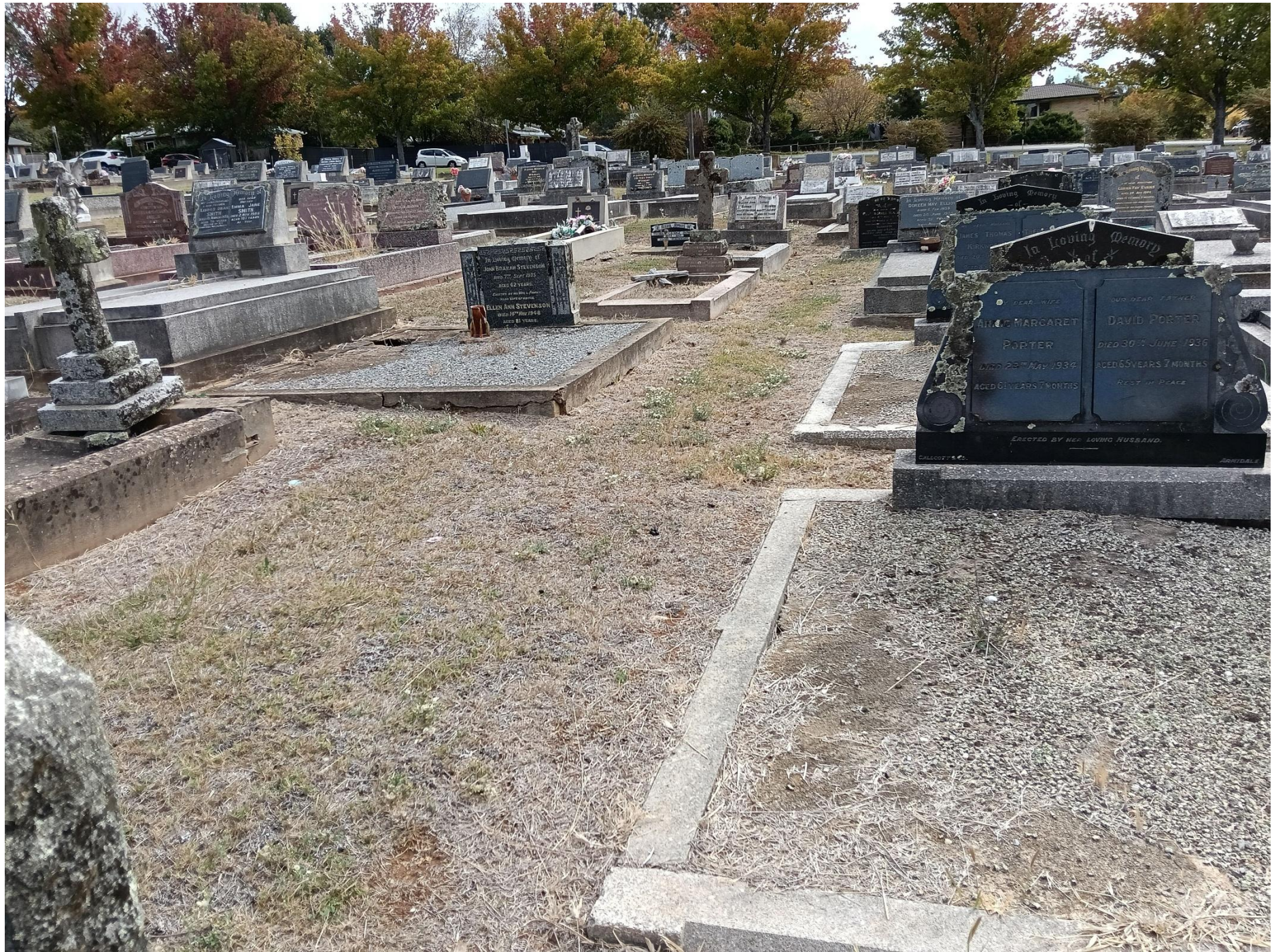
In March 1930 he declares that he has lost his "Discharged Badge" in camp and is issued with a replacement.

He dies on 8 October 1933 aged 54.

This extract I found on the "Find a Grave" website. It makes sobering reading.

“Learning with concern that a Digger, who died in the Armidale Hospital on Monday, had been buried as a pauper, members of the Armidale sub-branch of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia made a fine gesture in honouring a departed comrade. They found that the man, Walter Wheldon, whose age was given as 56, had been a member of the 4th Battalion, A.I.F., that he had enlisted at Quirindi towards the end of 1915, and had seen three years' service. He was a Quartermaster-Sergeant on service.

He had no friends and relatives in the district and was destitute. His only sister, whose name is unknown, is said to live in British Columbia. The sub-branch officials had the body exhumed and placed in a fitting casket, and about twelve ex-service men attended a second burial, when the remains were laid to rest in the Church of England portion of the Armidale cemetery.” He is buried in Row 31 Plot 31. The grave is now unmarked, but thank you to Tracey Hughes for sending over a photo of the grave site.



In Loving Memory of
JON BIRNAN STEVENSON
BORN 7th Sept 1925
AGED 62 YEARS
DIED 19th May 1987
AGED 61 YEARS

In Loving Memory
DEAR WIFE
MARGARET
PORTER
DIED 28th MAY 1934
AGED 61 YEARS 7 MONTHS

OUR DEAR FATHER
DAVID PORTER
DIED 30th JUNE 1936
AGED 65 YEARS 7 MONTHS
REST IN PEACE

ERECTED BY HER LOVING HUSBAND.

ARNIDALE

His name appears on the Inverell District Great War Honour Roll.



Sadly, he had clearly lost touch with his family by this stage, or they had turned their backs on him. But he did in fact have, along with his wife and sons, 3 brothers and 3 sisters, of which one sister, Edith Annie, had indeed married and emigrated to Canada.

His younger brother Albert had fought and died on the Western Front. He enlisted on 4 December 1915. Through the Reserve and the 4th Battalion Northern Fusiliers (Service No. 3833) on 9 September 1916 he transfers to the 49th Division, 147th Brigade, 1/5th Battalion of the Duke of Wellington West Riding Regiment, C Company (Service No.7114). I do wonder how soldiers felt about transfers of this nature and their loyalties within a Regiment; was it not disruptive for them or were they moving with their chums? In action on the 17 September 1916 near Thiepval he is shot in legs (machine gun fire most probably) and on 27 September 1916 he dies of his wounds at Wimereux, near the medical base, where he is buried in the Communal Cemetery.

Walter's sons both fought in WW2.

Sydney Arthur Wheldon, born 2 May 1918, enlisted on 15 March 1940 and was a Gunner with the 53rd Heavy Regiment RA. Service No. 1553957.

Harold Walter Wheldon, born 16 June 1919, joins the Royal Navy (No C/JX 198111) and is serving on HM Sub *Turbulent* when on 23 March 1943 it is lost along with his life.

This extract makes interesting reading in this context:

"Turbulent sank a huge amount of enemy shipping and endured numerous attacks. The Royal history saying "Turbulent sank over 90,000 tons of enemy shipping. She was depth charged on over 250 occasions by enemy forces hunting her."^[3]

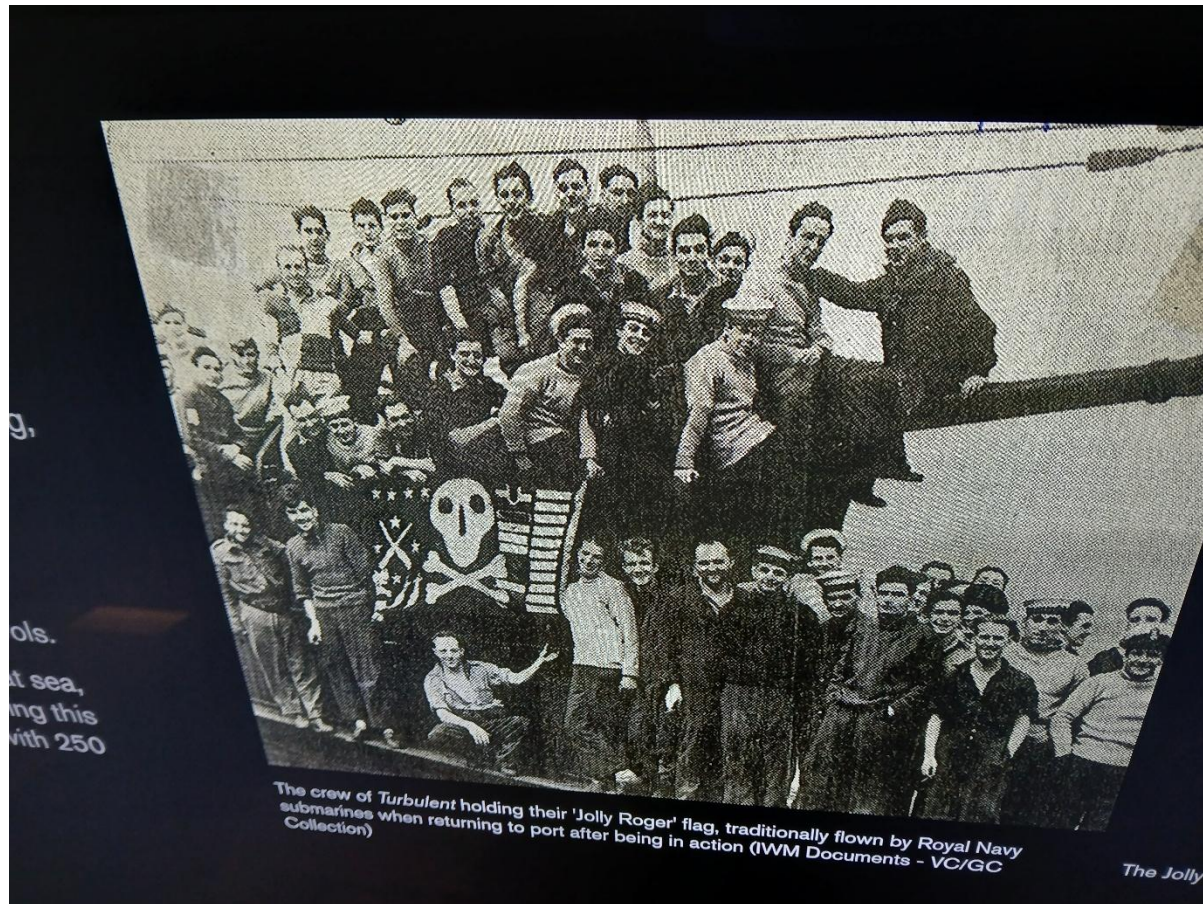
In recognition of this achievement, and the gallantry of *Turbulent's* crew, her commander, [John Wallace Linton](#), [DSO](#) [DSC](#) [RN](#) was posthumously awarded the [Victoria Cross](#) in May 1943.

The King has been graciously pleased to approve of the grant of the Victoria Cross for great valour in command of HM Submarines to Commander John Wallace Linton, DSO, DSC, Royal Navy. From the outbreak of War until H.M.S. *Turbulent's* last patrol Commander Linton was constantly in command of submarines, and during that time inflicted great damage on the Enemy. He sank one Cruiser, one Destroyer, one U-boat, twenty-eight Supply Ships, some 100,000 tons in all, and destroyed three trains by gun-fire. In his last year he spent two hundred and fifty-four days at sea, submerged for nearly 'half the time, and his ship was hunted thirteen times and had two hundred and fifty depth charges aimed at her. His many and brilliant successes were due to his constant activity and skill, and the daring which never failed him when there was an Enemy to be attacked. On one occasion, for instance, in H.M.S. *Turbulent*, he sighted a convoy of two Merchantmen and two Destroyers in mist and moonlight. He worked round ahead of

the convoy and dived to attack it as it passed through the moon's rays. On bringing his sights to bear he found himself right ahead of a Destroyer. Yet he held his course till the Destroyer was almost on top of him, and, when his sights came on the convoy, he fired. His great courage and determination were rewarded. He sank one Merchantman and one Destroyer outright, and set the other Merchantman on fire so that she blew up.

—*London Gazette 25 May 1943*”

Mindful that the Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum would close, with my friend Paul White we decided to pay a visit. On display were the Linton medals, the VC still in its box. But most interesting also was the home-made Jolly Roger flag flown from the Submarine on their returns to port and also a picture of Captain Linton and his crew. Somewhere there most probably is Harold ! It would be amazing to be able to identify him.



I have very much enjoyed this mini-research challenge, looking at all the links and connections. And thanks to everyone who have supported me and for the use of the extracts used to support and add colour to this narrative.

Between the criss-cross paths of two World Wars, these objects tend to seek us out. Who would have thought a simple post card, signature, date and address could lead us down so many interesting paths.

All that remains is to work out when he left for Australia in the first place and possibly peel back some more layers of his life in Australia. Then again, you never know what else might turn up.

We will remember them!

Tim Fairbairn

January 2026