

The Valiant Never Taste of Death but Once¹.

A simple sterling silver frame has held a place of honour on my families piano since I can remember. The frame contains a portrait from c1915 of then **2nd Lieut. D. Gerald Evans MC, MiD (later Capt 8th Battalion, DOW 20/9/1917)**, my great uncle. Garlanding the portrait are some dried flowers. In a letter to his mother Eleanor Lucy Evans, dated 1/4/1916, that is secreted at the frames back, Gerald reports *"I picked some daisies and will send one home in the letter, there is plenty of spear grass which reminded me of home."* These he picked at his first camp in France near Marseillse where the 7th and 8th Battalions troop ship, HMTS Megantic landed in France 30/3/1916. Two other letters reside in the frame along with a lock of his hair, presumably cut before he left by Eleanor Lucy. The letter dated 3rd October 1917 to **Private F Evans (51st Inf Battalion, KIA, 13/10/1917)** from father John Evans, complete with envelope, is ominous as it is bluntly stamped with "DECEASED" and "Undeliverable", has "Returned Letter Office" tape at either end and finally someone has written in purple pencil: Killed in Action, 13/10/1917." The letter's purpose was to inform Ken that Gerald had been killed and John ended the letter with;

"Your Mother is standing by me and saying tell him I wish I could have my arms around him and love him & tell him to bear-up & come back to us. We will pray for you."



Pte Francis Evans,
51st Battalion, c1916



2nd Lieut. Gerald Evans,
22nd Battalion, c1915



Pte Rowland Jones c1916
5th Battalion, 1893-1987



John Evans letter 3/10/1917 that was returned after
Ken Evans KIA 13/10/1917



My hand with crooked little
finger

Gerald (b 8/12/1889) was the youngest of the family with eight older brothers and one surviving sister called Minnie (1873-1932). Francis Evans, or Ken (b 13/10/1984) as he was known to the family, was Gerald's

¹ 'Julius Caesar' by William Shakespeare, Act II - Scene II

older brother bar one, with the middle brother being Evan (1888-1953). From a young age many in the family, particularly the older members, commented that I looked very Gerald. This resemblance was also latter pointed out by **Rowley Jones (Rowland John Jones, Pte. 5th Battalion, 1893-1987)** by then a respected senior gentleman of the district. Rowley also informed me that Gerald was a fine judge of a man's character, something he also reputedly shared with his older brothers, Bertie (1875-1947) and Charles (1878-1943), both respected auctioneers and rural agents. There was one other physical linkage between Gerald and myself, that was as my mother was seek information, we both had crooked little fingers. That being that our little fingers took a distinct inward bend at the last knuckle. Later I would find out that this trait had been introduced via Eleanor Lucy (nee Whitty), Gerald's mother and my great grandmother. These linkages made for a compelling case for me to learn more about and try to understand great uncle Gerald. In this pursuit Gerald had been most helpful in that 76 of his letters between enlistment and his death in 1917 have survived. As Gerald said a number of times such as in this letter to Minnie (10/9/1916) "*I have not heard from Ken since he first enlisted, he is not a very good correspondent*" who in comparison we have a scant 13 relatively short letters remaining. Only a small number of letters from home, mainly to Gerald have survived. For Gerald in particular, these letters, along with letters from his comrades in arms, TROVE and the vast resources of the Australian War Memorial has enabled a relatively rich portrait of the man to be researched.

The younger Evans boys, Gearld, Evan and Ken attended Melbourne Grammer School in the first decade after Federation to complete their education. They were all excellent sportsmen with both Gerald and Evan being members of the schools 1st XVIII football team while Gerald and Ken represented the school in the prestigious 1st VIII rowing team. In the Moyhu district of NE Victoria it was recognized that when the Evans boys came home, the Moyhu football team prospered. In this Gerald played a key part as ruckman in the Moyhu Premiership football teams of 1909-1911 in the Ovens and King Association along with brothers Evan and Harry (1980-1944). Accounts of games published in the local newspapers such as the Wangaratta Chronicle over this time regularly put Gerald in the best players for Moyhu and describe his playing exploits. A report in the Wangaratta Chronicle (17 Feb 1915) noted on his enlistment that, "*Mr Evans (sic Gerald) is a fine athletic young fellow, and was one of the finest footballers in the Ovens and King Assocation.*" Of a similar mind was the younger **Austin Mahoney (later Capt 24th Battalion, MC, MiD)** joined the Moyhu team in 1912-1914. Later letters from both Gerald and Austin indicate a good friendship and mutual respect.

The Australian War Memorial's records show that Gerald enlisted in Wangaratta on the 8th of February 1915, where he presented for medical examination by Doctor Wyatt Docker, who considered him 'fit for active service.' Gerald was 24 years and 2 months old. He was a 'Collingwood 6 footer' at 5 foot 11 inches (180.5 cm) in height and weighed in at 13 st, 4 lbs (85 kg), hazel eyes and light brown hair). It was clear Gerald's enlistment was contentious within the family as indicated by his letter to his sister Minnie on 18/2/1915.

"You will be pleased to hear that I am going to the war. I volunteered last Monday & am going down next Monday evening 15th and will report myself the next day. There is only one reason I am not in Egypt now and that is Mother - but I know now when volunteers are getting scarcer she will be glad I am going."

Writing to Eleanor Lucy (19/2/1915), John was clearly looking to smooth over family differences.

"As Gerald wrote to Minnie yesterday, no doubt you will know before this reaches you that he has volunteered for the war, and will be going to Melbourne on Monday. You will feel this very much & so do I but he is doing what every man ought to do & when he asked me what I thought I had to say that he was doing right. I feel deeply for you. I would gladly go in Gerald's place but that would not do of course. There certain things a man must do himself."

Ken's enlistment was much more straight forward with the Australian War Memorial records showing that on enlistment Ken (Francis) was 32 years and 4 months old when he passed his medical examination at Blackboy Hill in Perth on March 3rd, 1916, being 5 ft, 9½ inches (176.5 cm) tall, tanned complexion, brown eyes and brown hair, and weighed in at 12 st, 2 lbs (77 kilos). Evan also tried to enlist multiple times but injuries to his "leg", as a result of playing football, seems to have ruled him out. Evan apparently underwent an operation on his legs in November of 1915 as Minnie wrote to Gerald on 18/11/1915. "*Evan came back with Katie on Tuesday, he looks well but has to use crutches & rest for a while - one leg isn't healed.*" Gerald later comforted Evan in a letter dated 17/7/1916. "*Am sorry to hear the Doctor would not pass your leg which is bad luck but perhaps just as well - you will be able to settle down to it better now.*" Correspondence for around a year shows Gerald tried to get Ken to transfer to the 8th Battalion such as that outlined in this letter to Evan, 3/8/1916.

“Ken could not possibly get back from the West to go home. I wanted him to enlist in Vic but evidently he scorned my advice; as a matter of fact I have a shrewd suspicion that he intended to enlist when he went to the West.”



Capt Jack Hogg MC, MiD
2nd MG Battalion, 1889-1953



Capt. Austin Mahony MC, MiD
24th Battalion, dow 9/10/1918²



Capt. Alec Campbell DSO
8th Battalion, 1889-1936³

Later Gerald conceded in a much later letter to his father (26/8/1917) that:

“... as you know Ken preferred not to come to my Battalion: perhaps he was right. I think brothers should not be together in this game -“



Army camp at Broadmeadows, c1915 with Cpl. Gerald Evans, his cobbers, Alec Campbell and Jack Hogg are also in this picture.

For Gerald, it was a long wait from enlistment to departure to Egypt. This time focused around the Broadmeadows AIF training camp was filled by training, frequent drilling and socialising with all the other young Victorian men who had enlisted. A certificate, dated May 11th, 1915, for “Infantry drill, musketry and field training,” indicates one component of the No 5 Officers Training School completed. It was also here that

² From Michael Ganey’s book, “The two captains: From Gallipoli to Montebain”

³ Extracted from AWM E 1811, The officers of the 8th Battalion, photographed 20/2/1918

Gerald met up and formed an enduring friendship with **Alec G Campbell** [later Captain, DSO], and **Jack (J.M.) Hogg** [later Major, MC, MiD, 2nd MG Coy/1st MG Bn] who all left Broadmeadows with commissions as 2nd Lieutenants. One of Gerald's reports to his mother in March 1915 was somewhat prescient.

"I see by the paper that it is still raining at Redcamp, you must be rather tired of it by now & should have a bit of mud with you too. I sent Father a pair of gum boots on Monday, they are very good in the mud, I have some. This place looks nice & green & should have some nice sheep feed on it soon."

A few weeks before departing Australia a farewell from the district to Gerald was given by Mr Richie Shanley, a longtime family friend, at his property 'Fairfield' Moyhu. In response to the districts wishes of "Godspeed and a safe return," Gerald responded:

"My heart is full when I see so many of my old friends around me tonight, and listened to the kind words said of me. I don't deserve them, if I were even worthy of a quarter of the I would be well satisfied. I am not a hero – I am only doing my duty in answering my countries call (Wangaratta Chronicle, 8/9/1915)."

I am sure this is a sentiment that was shared with many of Gerald's fellow volunteers. Among the gifts Gerald was given before departing Australia, was a gold wrist watch (at the farewell), a leather wallet and a copy of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" dated 24/9/1915.

It was now time for the adventure of a young man's lifetime to begin. Gerald and his cobbers left Australia on the 29th September 1915, as part of the 22nd Battalion reinforcements, on HMAT Osterley. The Osterley arrived in Egypt on 25/10/1915. As Gerald excitedly narrated to his mother (26/10/1915).

"We have arrived in Egypt at last. We got to Suez at 6 yesterday morning & left there about midday arriving at Zeitoun at 6.30. Zeitoun is about 10 miles from Cairo & very near Heliopolis. The trip from Suez was the most wonderful sight I have ever seen, right up the valley of the Nile & through the Irrigation Area. The place is swarming with natives working or pretending to. The ploughs look about 2000 years old & are drawn by two cows or bullocks that look like they come out of the old Bible pictures. The funniest thing is to see the little donkeys getting along with great loads, and sometimes a nigger or two.

The weather is pretty hot in the day & cool at night & the sand is the very devil to walk in. There are thousands of horses over here doing nothing!"



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P06566.003

Group portrait of Australian junior officers on HMAT Osterley on their way to Egypt. 2nd Lieut Gerald Evans (back row, 2nd from left) and 2nd Lieut. Alec Campbell (back row, 4th from right)

A few weeks later, Gerald's mood was still wide eyed and boyant as can be gathered by this letter to his mother (7/11/1915).

"Last Sunday half a dozen of us went out to the Pyramids & had a pretty good time. The Sphinx is a good deal knocked about in the face. We went all around on camels & finished up by having a race on donkeys down to the Mena Station.

I went through the Museum last week, they have plenty of Mummys there, lots of them thousands of years old, also some Alabaster statues. This week I have been over to Abbassia for three days doing the Musketry course at the Rifle Range, it was pretty hot in the day time. I am getting together quite a fluent vocabulary in Arabic & can swear with the best of them. They have some beautiful Mosques but I haven't been through them yet. Some of the ladies don't look bad over here but they have their faces half covered by a veil. Don't know what they are like after it is removed."

There was however a degree of hardwork with hot route marches through the desert in the sand. Gerald also successfully completed a three week "Machine Gun Officer Class, No. 10 Course" at the School of Instruction, Zeitoun, 1915.

The combination of large numbers of young men, tightly grouped together in the same place resulted in a contagion of many communicable diseases. For Gerald this was a stint in the 4th Australian Auxilliary Hospital, Attassich with mumps. Ken also suffered mumps in early 1917 after he arrived in England. While in Hospital he was pleased to hear that;

"I have been allotted to the 8th Battalion in this here organisation & am very glad to have a settled unit at last. Alec Campbell & Jack Hogg⁴ who I have been with all the time went down today & I will waste no time in joining us when I can get out of this place (to mother, 22/2/1916).



Route march in Egypt across canal c 1915/1916



2nd Lieut Gerald Evans
receiving prize ribbon, Bn Sports

A large attraction of Egypt, despite the sand, heat and wearing route marches, was the opportunity to catch up with other mates from home. In his letters, many references to the local boys are provided such as the following:

"Charlie McCardel was in my camp for a good while but they have moved out somewhere since I came into hospital, so don't know where he is now. There were a lot of fellows I knew in that camp, all that Greta crowd & Young & Conners from Wangaratta (to mother, 22/2/1916)."

One of the the Greta crowd was Austin Mahony who had been on Gallipoli and reported (16/1/1916):

"He a has had a number of visitors to his tent, included amounst them Lieut. Gerald Evans, of Redcamp, who looks bigger than ever, and looks the picture of health (Wangaratta Chronicle, 4/3/1916)."

In those days, being called "fat" and being in the picture of health was a compliment – as being 'grazing on a good paddock' – particularly after the privations of Gallipoli!

If Egypt had opened Gerald's eyes with its history and exotic charm, France was to take this to a whole new level, particularly in terms of its agricultural richness.

"We arrived quite safely last night. I managed to dodge the Torpedoes, the Captain never left the bridge all the way from Alexandria. We left on Monday and arrived here on Friday.

This is the prettiest port I have seen yet. We got in about 4 pm and passed the Notre Dame de Armeniers right up on a hill & as we came into the harbour, passed within 50 yards of the Chateau d'if where the Count of Monte Cristo was imprisoned, it is a very small island right in the mouth of the harbour with a very old stone building on it.

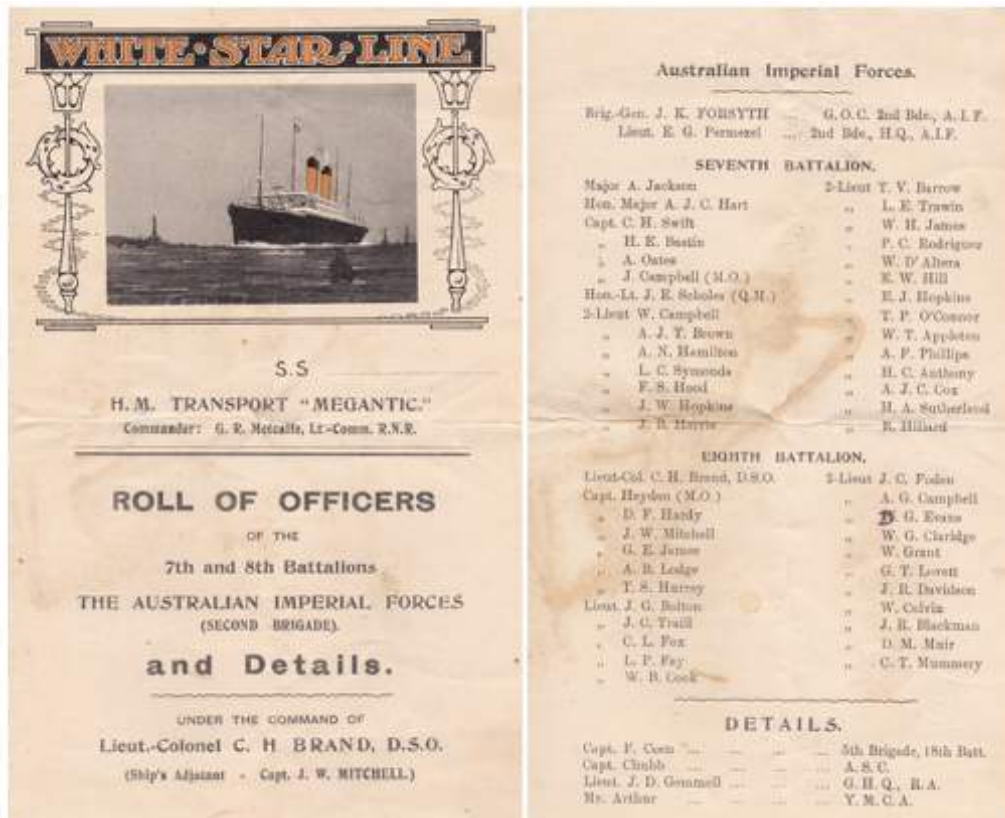
⁴ Lieut. Jack (JM) later 2nd Australian Machine Gun Company, MC, MiD

All the troops but two corps went on by train, I stayed and we had to march about a mile and a half to this camp getting here at 11 pm. The country around the bay is very hilly and rocky and our camp is in a small basin with old houses & vineyards and orchards all around it & quite close.

Everything is beautifully green with the Spring just coming on and I am afraid La belle France knocks poor old Australia into a cocked hat for beauty (to mother, 1/4/1916)"

In 18 months on the western front in France, Gerald talked sparingly about the fighting in which he was involved. In part this was because he had a duty as one of his company's censors and I suspect this was convenient as he obviously wanted to shield his beloved mother and sister (Minnie) from the realities of war.

The Censoring of the letters has been very strict lately & as I have to do it all for my men, I get pretty sick of it. It takes us a lot of time,, but I should be able to write a good love letter soon. Some of them are very lovey dovey (to mother, 19/12/1915, Egypt)."



Officers Roll for the transport of the 7th & 8th Battalions, Alexandria (26/3/1916) to Marseilles (1/4/1916)

There are Australians every where now and they get on pretty well with the people. It is raining hard tonight, so there will be some more mud tomorrow. Have you read "The Sentimental Bloke" by C.J. Dennis? It is awfully good & a great favourite here (to mother, 18/4/1916, Erquinghem-Lys, France)."

The grass among these trenches is wonderful, prairie & cocksfoot mixed with self sown stuff of all kinds three foot high, I would like to take up a run here for bullocks, but not just now (to mother, 4/6/1916, Fleurbaix, France).

I saw Austin Mahony who used to play football with us, he is looking awfully well & very fat. I think soldiering must agree with him better than his former work (to mother, 11/8/1916, Vadencourt, France)." Austin sent a similar report home (11/8/1916), that was published in the Wangaratta Chronicle (7/10/1916), of this meeting reporting Gerald to be looking very well and fat as well.

Have you got many sheep to shear? It is dead funny to see them shearing here, they round them up in the paddock, stick a couple of hurdles round them & get busy, most of them will eat out of your hand- Reapers and binders are very scarce, but one day during a march we halted near where one was working & one of the boys did a couple of rounds on the binder to keep his hand in, he looked a trick going around with his pack on – (to Evan, 28/8/1916, Baileul, France)."

"We have been having a spell lately and feeling quite bucked up. - We had a football match yesterday with the 7th Battalion and beat them easily - some very good men were playing including several league players.

The old French woman in this billet is a hard case, she is about 80 & lives by herself, is a good old sort & told me her whole history the other night, I don't think she has ever been out of the village – (to mother, 24/11/1916, Buive – sur-l'Ancere)."

"I had a game of football for my Company & we won the Battalion competition. Roy Kennedy of Milawa was playing against me. It took several days to recover from my exertions – (to Evan, 20/3/1917, Buive – sur-l'Ancere, France)."

"The men are in great heart and appreciate the change of weather; we had a hurried move forward some little-time ago and when the Company was ready to move I found one platoon had a football ready to take along, these men will always play football under shell fire – (to father, 1/5/1917, Morchies, France)."

Where Gerald touched upon the war, it was typically muted to accomodation, tucker or the doings of the men. These were safe topics for censorship and for the Evans women back home.

"There are six of us in this Billet & we live jolly well. The tucker in the trenches is not bad either & the dugout fairly comfortable but you have to keep your clothes on all night.

This week the weather has been beautiful just like the Spring in Australia, in fine weather the aeroplanes are always very active.. On Tuesday last the anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli (25/4/1916) this Battalion held a sports meeting (to mother, 29/4/1916, Erquinghem-Lys)."

"It was funny the night we came in; the trenches here are very close to the villages & as we came in through the homes the Hawthorn hedges were quite white with blossom. There are plenty of quail, pheasants and partridges about the trenches but I have not shot any yet. There is a full moon & it shows things up well (to mother, 17/5/1916, near Fromelles, France)."

"This is not a bad war if one can dodge the few chances of getting cracked that are going, we live fairly well, even here in the front line, we have a cook who is an excellent forager & last night had cold roast beef with three vegetables & salad with dressing & spring onions all complete, & we topped it off with stewed rhubarb & whipped cream (to Minnie 25/5/1916, near Fromelles, France)."

The Germans have a bomb called the "Minnewerfer" (Minnie for short). It holds about a gallon of scrap iron, bits of shell etc, anything that will hurt, you can see them coming through the air quite plainly in the day time, they have sent a lot over here, but have not caught anybody yet; but make a dickens of a noise – (to Minnie, 10/9/1916, Ypres. Belgium). Gearld didn't elaborate on the Australian troops full nick-name for the "Minnewerfer", was a "moaning Minnie."

"We are having a bit of a spell now and it is very acceptable, the weather conditions are worse than the Germans and the mud is indescribable, though I have heard some excellent attempts at describing it from the men (to Albert (1877-1929), 19/11/1916, St Vaast, France)."

To learn about how Gerald was conducting himself in the trenches and his reputation with the men of the 8th Battalion, we have to rely on the communications of others.

As I said before he had just come out of the warmest corner in this part of the globe, and consequently was somewhat dirty & unshaven and a bit ragged and he hadn't had a sleep for several days. Do you realise what that means? In case you don't fully, I'll give you an idea in a few words. It means that he has been with his men playing a big part in the biggest game being played in the world today, with the result that his company took & held the most advanced position we hold in our line today and the fact that I saw him tired & dirty is clear proof that he wasn't only showing his man how to play the game but was helping them to play it and it takes a man to do that, a Gentleman and a sportsman, and when we get them for leaders, the rank and file won't fail and the result of the game is never in doubt. Unfortunately we get too few such. You have reason to be very proud of your representative from Redcamp. (to Evan 27/7/1916, from mutual friend Sgt. 'Bill' TWC Usherwood, 23rd Battalion, after Pozières). Bill went MIA soon after at Pozières on 4/8/1916. His name is inscribed on the wall at Villers Bretonneux for those with no known grave.

D Coy. Commander, **Capt. James S. Hurrey** MiD, reported (28/9/1917): *"Jerry was a grand man, and on the occasion of the attack on Pozières (24-25/7/1916) we spent 12 hours in the Chalk Pit. The Bosche had seen us enter there, and that 12 hours I shall not forget. I had been slightly wounded, and very badly shaken just reaching that point. Jerry was wounded in the side and I felt hopeless almost quite sure he would go away, but to his everlasting credit he returned after having*

his would dressed. D Coy. 8th Bn. completed the capture of Pozières. We took 3 M. guns and 59 prisoners. We were 600 yds in advance of the furthest strong point and 1000 yds in advance of our line. We followed our own barrage so closely that we got to between the German strong points unseen, and into K. Trench before the Bosche had chance to use his M. guns. The attack took place just before day-break, and when day broke we saw 1000 Bosches between us and our line. Our fire decimated them. Jerry used one of their own M. guns, and as my orders were no prisoners on account of our isolated position, the 59 men we took actually got through the fire to us."

Father John later reported a conversation with Capt Hurrey in 1917 where Hurrey said Gerald had saved his life twice. (Letter, John to Ken October? 1917)

Gerald's report's on Pozières were far less graphic: *"I have not written for some time as we have been rather busy & have not had an opportunity - but I was lucky enough to get out of it with a slight crack on the ribs & did not leave the Company. ... Our Battalion has done remarkably & my Company was furthest ahead of the lot (to mother, 31/7/1916 Canaples, France)."*

The Official 8th Battalion Diaries on that day reports: *"On the 25/7/1916, D Coy was 50 yds beyond Cemetery and C Coy met with strong opposition that was overcome with great determination speedily to get to their objective NE of Village (cemetery). D Coy sent forward a patrol which came within 50 yds of Mouquet Farm m (led by RSM Frank Goodwin, later Lieutenant), later seeing strong German forces moving along the OG1/OG2 towards the Windmill. Reported this and called in artillery bombardment on the Germans. Very heavy shelling during day. Consolidation."*

Lieutenant DG Evans, 8th Battalion, March to September, 1916 MiD recommended 6/9/1916

As a platoon Commander of "D" Coy, this officer has done consistently good work. In the attack on Pozières on 25/7/16 he showed great courage and initiative. His platoon led the attack and under heavy fire from M. guns and artillery. He has the credentials for leadership, and his coolness and calm courage have given the men under him great confidence. (Australia Gazette No. 103, 29/6/1917), (*sic Originally MC recommendation*).

Major General N.M. Smyth on behalf of Major General HB Walker

Commanding 1st Australian Division



Cpl. Frank Dwyer MM
(1889-1922), 8th Battalion
Ron Austin "Cobbers in Khaki" 1997



Pte. Harry Whitty
(1894-1972), 37th Battalion
(cousin, family photo)



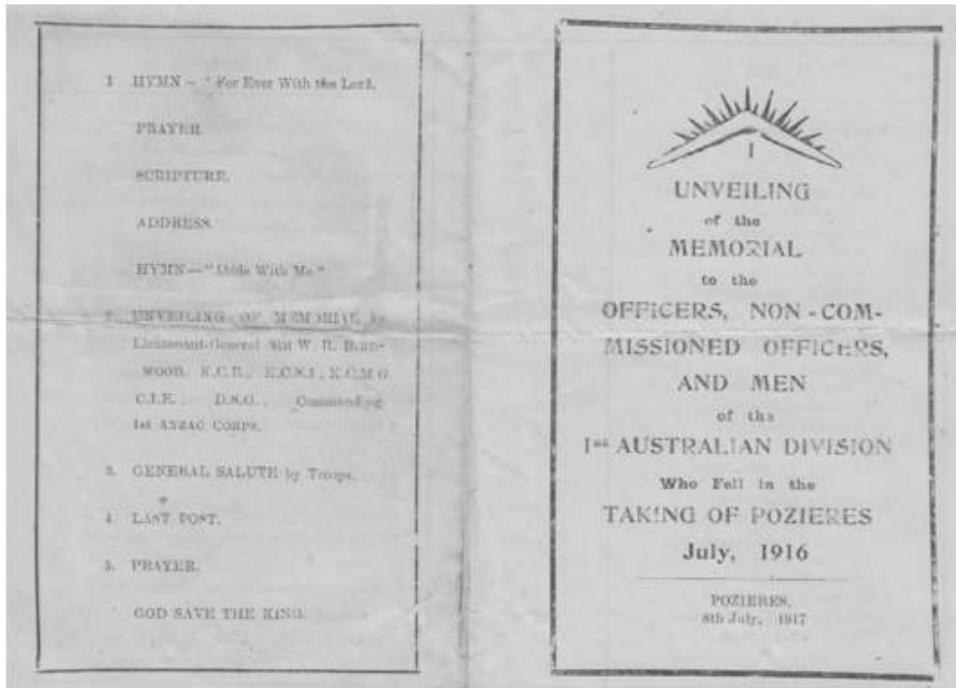
Capt James S. Hurrey
MiD, 8th Bn, 1884-1965
(family photo)

Certainly post-Pozières Gerald's reputation and reliability became widely known, both in the 8th Battalion and outside. Gerald's footballing cobbler, Liet. Austin Mahony (24th Bn) caught up with him soon after the first battle of Pozières.

"Next day Lieut. Gerald Evans happened along, and he is looking bigger than ever. They say he is a great man in the trenches. Who should I meet next but Cpl. Frank Dwyer. He is looking very well too, and they tell me that he is absolutely without fear in the trenches. He and

Gearld Evans do great work together I am told (Wangaratta Chronicle 7/10/1916, original letter 18/8/1918)."

Cousin Pte Harry Whitty (37th Battalion), wrote home to his aunt Eleanor (Gerald's mother): *"I also met a chap at Bonnington Camp who was in Gerald's company in the 8th Battalion. He said Gerald was very popular with his men & was well when he left. We are going to France I think in a few weeks time, so I may have a chance to see Gerald then (25/11/1916, Salisbury Plains, UK)."*



Above: Service order for the unveiling of the Pozieres 1st Division Memorial, 8th July, 1917. Words for the following hymn on reverse side, 'For ever with the Lord' and 'Abide with me' Gerald and seven other men of D Coy 8th Battalion selected as representatives for this service.
Below: Picture of Pozieres Memorial Service, 8th July, 1917, AWM E20126



Perhaps his most universal compliment to his fellow coppers was: *"I will not be sorry to get back to the Battalion, as it becomes quite like home and one misses everything that is going on there. There are some grand fellows in my Battalion and it is almost worth going to war to know them (to mother, 7/2/1917, Bazentin, France)."*

Gerald for his part was not backward in praising to those who has performed admirably on the front line.

“We have had an easy off the last few days & the boys are celebrating it in great style; they deserve it too, if anyone says anything to the detriment of the Australian Soldier, give him one for me – (to Evan, 3-8-1916, Canaples, France).”

“Tell Mother that two of the best soldiers & hardest cases I have struck yet are named Dwyer & Reilly, they are both wounded now. Your last letter was written on the day that I was wounded, we were having a very warm time then – (to Minnie, 10/9/1916, Ypres, Belgium).”

“Also saw Austin Mahoney and congratulated him on his Military Cross - he has a commission too, so has done very well, good luck to him (to mother, 8/12/1916, Buive – sur-l’Ancere, France).”

Gerald’s next opportunity to draw favorable attention to himself was on the night of the 30th of September 1916 as the leader of a raiding party with support from Lieutenants Francis W. Goodwin [MC+bar, MID, KIA 4/10/1917], W. Donovan Joynt [later VC, MID, 1889-1886⁵], John T. Maguire [3945, later MC, MID, KIA 4/10/1917] and CSM George Harris [DCM, MID]. It was in the Hollebeke area against trenches held by the 73rd Landwehr Regiment. The raiders scrambled across extensive entanglements using ladders and mats, and totally surprised the enemy. This action led to his second MiD commendation and in his description of it in letter to his mother on 10/10/1916 is typically low key and reassuring to her.

“There was a little matter of a raid that I happened to be in charge of, and I did not feel inclined to write till it was over; however it went off very successfully, and now can tell you all about it, it was very well done, & they have all said very nice things about me, and what you will probably like much better, I will not feel it is my turn to take part in a raid for a long time to come.”

Lieutenant DG Evans, 8th Battalion, MiD recommended 2nd October, 1916,

Running a raid on the German trenches near Hollebeke on the night of 30th Sept/1st Oct, Lt Evans was in command of the left raiding party. He trained his men so well that they do the work with calm regularity and precision in very great danger. He took his post on the enemy parapet and controlled his party with great coolness. The party killed one German and brought to our lines one wounded German from whom the necessary identification was established. His fine leadership was to a very great extent responsible for the success of his party. Australia Gazette, No. 169 4th October 1917 (*sic Originally MC recommendation*).

Major General Gordon Bennett, Commanding Officer



Lieut Frank/Willie Goodwin
MC & Bar, MiD, 8th Bn
b 1886 – KIA 4/10/1917



Capt Donovan Joynt VC, MiD
8th Bn, 1889-1886

Overall, after the eventful 1916 and early 1917 period was endured, Gerald and Ken became mugged by the grim realities of trench warfare. The early optimism of the following two letters cedes into the tired cynicism of the two which follow.

I have told you about my trip in previous letters to various members of the family so will not repeat it - I had a glorious time, quite the best holiday I have ever had - When you come over we will go for a trip to Ireland together.

We went for a bonzer trip through the islands of the west coast of Scotland & my only regret was that you could not be there too. It is quite a short trip from there to Ireland. (Gerald to mother, 29/10/1916, Ypres, Belgium).”

⁵ Lieut W.D. Joynt, later Capt and VC, was also an Old Melburnian.

"Since writing to you I have returned to the Battalion from leave; it has been raining a good deal here so things are not very cheerful but suppose I will soon settle down again soon –

"I saw Gerald for a few minutes yesterday. I was marching through a village where his Battalion had been billeted for four days and he happened to be standing on the side of the road, I couldn't stop but we saw one another at about the same time, and he walked along side me for a good way & we had a bit of a talk, I was more than glad to see him as I have been wishing to for some time & he looks really well. He was leaving there that afternoon and we are moving in the opposite directions at present. (Ken to mother, 22/3/1917, Dernacourt, France)." This was possibly the last time the two brothers met in this life.

Later in the same letter, Ken gave a more honest appraisal of the situation. *"All we want now is for the infernal war to end so as we can go to our dear homes in the only country in the world for me, Australia. However all will be well yet Mother dear & try not to worry too much as 1917 ought to see the end of it (Ken to mother, 25/3/1917, Mametz, France)."*

"Your letter of June 19th came a few days ago after we came out of the last stunt, which I managed to get through with just the tiniest crack on the shoulder which didn't hurt at all - It is great to get back and have a good hot bath & undisturbed sleep –

Am glad to hear you are having the house fixed. You had better get to work & build a dug out for me, I will have it 40 ft deep & two entrances like the Germans with electric light laid on - they must feel very annoyed to know that we are using them now - One place they had entire hospital under ground with kitchens, baths - everything billiard tables etc. They come in very useful now –

Yesterday we came through some very pretty country. They are harvesting now; the women do most of the work & do it very well. Reapers & binders are very rare. Mostly reaping hooks & scythes. One valley we passed through was surrounded by a low hill, they were harvesting right up the valley as well as hops & other green crops & hedges, there were about a dozen old windmills working around the hills & right on top was a very old Convent; been there since the flood.

They were playing baseball this afternoon near our Camp & get very excited over it, suppose you know what troops I mean; they are very hard cases & have a very pronounced twang (Gerald to Minnie, 27/8/1917, Meault, France)."

1st Anzac Corps, 4th June, 1917.

Dear Evans,

I write to congratulate you very heartily upon the Military Cross, which has been awarded to you for your good work in the operations near Bullecourt on the 8th and 9th May. I cannot speak too highly of the magnificent dash and determination which you displayed in organising and personally leading bombing attacks against the enemy, who were in possession of the right portion of the trench in which you had made your footing. After gaining about 200 yards in this way, you then carried out the consolidation of the position, and later repelled three strong counter-attacks. Your conduct throughout was of the highest order, and I am glad to have this opportunity of thanking you for it.

With good wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

V. D. Birdwood

BIRDWOOD

For Gerald, there was yet to come one more dashing action that would enhance his reputation. Firstly, on the 24th of April 1917 he was promoted to Captain and took over the command of the 8th Battalion's A Coy. It was not long before the 8th Battalion was again in the thick of the action. On the 8th of May, Gerald's company took over and strongly defended a 200 yard stretch of the German OG2 trench, that was on the town side of where the Bullecourt Digger statue is today. Incidentally, then Sgt. Percy Lay, as part of A Coy, was deservedly awarded a DCM for his part in this action (see CEW Bean). Gerald was awarded a Military Cross for his contribution in what was considered to be one of the toughest hand to hand bombing exchanges of the war. For Gerald it was third time lucky with MC recommendations. The congratulations, were personally signed by Australian army Corps commander General William Birdwood, were communicated as shown below.

Unfortunately, the winds of war were going to blow ill for both the Evans boys during what would be known as the Battles for Passchendaele or Third Battle of Ypres. As Gerald was leading D Coy through Clapham Junction on the way to Polygon Wood, Gerald was struck by shrapnel from SOS barrage. The shrapnel pierced his abdomen and broke his femur. The bleeding was uncontrollable in those days. CEW Bean reports⁶ that he refused to let stretcher-bearers delay the assembly by picking him up. They went back later for him but he died of wounds at the 10th Canadian Clearing station on the Menin Rd 20th September, 1917. It could well be that he is one of the wounded in Capt Frank Hurley's famous photograph of the Menin Rd at 9am on that (below). Father John wrote a letter to Ken dated 3/10/1917 to break the news to Ken of Gerald's death. This letter was never delivered. On the 13/10/1917, Ken was directly hit by a shell along with two comrades in Broodseinde, moving towards Tyne Cot.



A scene on the Menin Road near Hooze, looking towards Birr Cross Roads, during the battle on 20 September 1917 by Frank Hurley. AWM E00711



David (father) and Julie (sister) Evans at Clapham Junction, July 2000



Capt James S. Hurrey MiD
(1884-1965), 8th Battalion



Pte. Edward Lay, (1890-1966)
A Coy, 8th Battalion, from Max Lay
"Edward Lay's First World War Diaries, 2009

⁶ CEW Beans "Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918"

Ironically, the day that Gerald was fatally wounded was described by one of the most decorated men in the 8th Battalion, Lieutenant Percy Lay [DCM, MM, MC, CdeG] in his personal diary as being a day of success and a relatively light day for casualties. The reverberations of Gerald's falling were sorely felt among his friends and comrades. Percy Lay also remarked in his diary on that day. *"We have lost the best Captain in the AIF."*⁷ Capt J.S. Hurrey MiD, in his condolence letter to the family (28/9/1917, Melbourne), extended his praise by saying:

"Gerry was a grand man... I cannot speak highly enough of Gerry's courage and behaviour.... The test of a man is to know what the men think of him and Gerry was, to use the boy's own phrase betokening the hall-mark 'A Dinkim Bloke.' Believe me, that is the highest tribute a man can be paid."



Grave of Capt DG Evans MC, 1917, as commissioned by 8th Battalion, with Capt AG Campbell's flowers planted



Grave of Capt DG Evans MC, July 2000 with Redcamp soil being sprinkled on it, Lijsenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium



Capt Joseph Booth
MC, CMG
(1886-19965), 8th Battalion



Lieut. Richard Andrewatha
MC, MiD (later Major)
(1888-1959), 8th Battalion



Capt. Percy Lay M.C., D.C.M., M.M.,
C. de G. (1892-1955), 8th Battalion.
Portrait WB McInnes AWM ART03184

Long time friend Capt Alec Campbell DSO, (3/10/1917, Ypres) wrote the following to Redcamp:

"He and I had managed to stick together since we were Non. Coms. at Broadmeadows, and he is the best friend I have ever had.... He died at the 10th Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, and I shall go across there some time this week and get whatever information I can about

⁷ JL Turner (1983), "The war diaries of Captain Percy Lay" B. & H. Publisher.

him. So far, I have only heard that some pieces of shell went through his leg and body, but I have heard no other details.

I also went to the Cemetery, which was close by and saw his grave. The registration unit people are putting up a Cross, but the Battalion is having a special one made for it. I saw the man who is responsible for looking after the graves, and made arrangements for him to look after Gerry's, and to plant some flowers on it."

Another brave and decent man, the highly respected **Capt. Joseph Booth**, MC, CMG (8th Battalion Chaplain) wrote to the family on 25/9/1917:

"I knew him as a personal friend and tried to see him as often as I could for his friendship was a coveted thing. All his officers and men alike regarded him as a model man, clean and strong. His Company loved him and every man in his charge spoke of him as "one of the best". Perhaps the highest praise a soldier can bestow on any man.

Fearless and true in all his dealings. He was in every sense a nobleman. He did not reach the front line but was caught by a piece of shell as the boys were marching forward. Loving hands bore him to the aid post and he reached the Casualty Clearing Station some miles behind the line. We were deeply shocked to learn that he passed away the next day. Those who saw him say he did not suffer and slowly lipped into the great beyond....

He died as he lived an example to all. None need ever be ought but proud to call him friend. He paid the greatest price that man can pay. "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friend." John and Eleanor subsequently used this as Gerald's epitath on Gerald's gravestone.

Finally, it was the task for Lieut. Richard Andrewartha (later major) to sum up the 8th Battalions feelings about Gerald's loss.

Andrewartha,
France, 24/9/17

Dear Mr. Evans,

It is my sad duty as one of Gerald's Officers in "A" Company, 8th Battalion to have to write to you and tell you of his death. At present quite a gloom hangs over the 'A' Company and the Battalion and Brigade over Gerald's death. I was one of his platoon officers, and one of the two officers with him at Bullecourt in the bombing attack when he won the Military Cross. On the morning of the 20th Gerald was just assembling his company prior to the great attack and was hit by a shell, and died the same day. Just a few days before the attack, I was sent to Brigade as Brigade Bombing Officer and felt I was leaving a grand friend as Gerald and I had been together in "A" Company for some time, and I was the oldest "A" Company left, and we were the oldest "A" Company left, and we were in the same billet together. When his Military Cross came through the men cheered, and when his Captaincy came we were more proud of him than ever. The boys worshipped him, his officers, his Colonel and his General loved him.

Though he made the greatest sacrifice, in that he laid down his life for his King, his Country and his God, the life he led, the example he set for us, will never be forgotten. He lived for everything that was good and clean, and had high, lofty and noble ideals, and above all he was a man among men. My mind last night was taken was taken back to Gerald when I heard a man recite 'Be a man.'⁸

God grant that you may be helped to bear the great loss which has befallen you. We have lost our leader, our friend, our brother in arms, but when the men went over the top last Thursday morning they knew what was required of them and they answered the call. We have a vacant chair which can never be filled. Though he will not be with us in person we will always remember him. Our Padre will write to you, also our Colonel, and may this dreadful war soon end.

I must now conclude.

Yours sincerely,

signed

R.V. Andrewartha. Lieut.

In what many literary critics consider to be Australia's rival to Erich Maria Lemarque's "*All quite on the Western Front*", Frederic Manning paraphrased William Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act II, Scene II for the title of his book, "*The middle parts of fortune* (1929)."⁹ In many ways, the book and its title summarise the

⁸ Rudyard Kipling, "If", dedicated to the poet's son John who was killed in the Battle of Loos in 1915.

⁹ Paraphrasing of Shakespeare's Hamlet by Frederick Manning

significant contribution made by privates such as Ken Evans, Edward Lay (Percy Lay's older brother), Harry Whitty, Rowley Jones and all the rest who fought valiantly but were never singled out for distinction. The satisfactory completion of WWI from the Allies perspective would not have been possible without their roles both during the war and their enduring of the consequences of that contribution after the war was finished.



Grave of **Pte. F. (Ken) Evans**, July 2000 with Redcamp soil being sprinkled on it. Passchendaele New British Military Cemetery, Belgium

After the events of Gerald and Ken's deaths during the 3rd Battle of Ypres, holistically known as the Battle for Passchendaele, Gerald and Ken's letters would have kept trickling in to prolong the distress of their passing for the family and particularly Eleanor Lucy. The typical time for a letter to reach home was around two months. There would also be letters sent in hope, like that of John (3/10/1917) attempting to inform Ken of Gerald's death, that would be painfully returned. There was also of course the return of their possessions from France, and later the medals they were awarded and the "WWI Penny." However some time in the mid to late '20's a final 'personal award' to Gerald from an unexpected place was bestowed. As there are no written communications, original or typed out copies (the most significant communications were typed and copied by carbon paper), I can only suspect this news was conveyed in person, either at Redcamp or more likely, in Melbourne.

The explanation behind this news begins with a letter from Gerald, at an Officers Training Camp near Chateau Fixecourt (between Abbeville and Amiens) in France, 2/1/1917 to 11/2/1917 (to mother 7/1/1917):

"Don't think I have written to you since Xmas day so here goes - Am at present at an Army School of Instruction for five weeks, which is rather a chuck in at his time of year; as I have a good bed and comfortable room, besides the school is really a good one.

The work is pretty constant and covers nearly everything. I had a lesson in riding the other day and we have another tomorrow at 7.45, rather early at this time of year. There are a lot of English officers here and one of them said this morning "I do detest early morning riding, it makes me positively sick". I had some great fun at the riding lesson, don't think some of them had ever seen a horse before except in pictures. You must excuse the writing but my hands are jolly cold...."

This afternoon I am to play in the Hockey match, they wanted to make another team and as they said I could kick, hit or anything I thought the chance was too good to miss."

This letter gives an appreciation of the general regard that the Australian soldiers held the British and particularly their commanders. There were of course exceptions made for people like General William Birdwood who was happy to give the Australians their due. After Gallipoli, and the disastrous commands under Generals such as Haking, Rawlinson, Hamilton, Munro, Gough, etc who could blame them? However, that is where I think Gerald's fine judge of character came in. I am almost certain Gerald met another up and coming British Officer who was brave as well as deserving of respect. That officer was Capt. Henry Lascelles (1882-1947) of the 3rd Grenadier Guards, who was also by repute, an good judge of character. That they met is evidenced by a training school postcard of the aspiring officers at the school shown above. Both Gerald and Lascelles can be clearly identified in this photo.

Capt. Henry Lascelles survived the war ending it being the commanding officer of his 3rd Grenadier Guards Regiment. For his courage he was awarded the C. de G., a MiD and a D.S.O. Inquiring about the post war fate of Gerald's friend, Capt. Alec Campbell with the Australian War Memorial. A researcher there, Andrew Jack, replied with the following in an email:

William Shakespeare, "Hamlet", (Act II, Scene II). *Hamlet: My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do you both? Rosencrantz: As the indifferent children of the earth. Guildenstern: Happy, in that we are not overhappy. On Fortune's cap we are not the very button. Hamlet: Nor the soles of her shoes? Rosencrantz: Neither, my lord. Hamlet: Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favors? Guildenstern: Faith, her privates we. Hamlet: In the secret parts of Fortune? Oh, most true. She is a strumpet. What news? Rosencrantz: None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest. Hamlet: Then is doomsday near?*

"I've attached a typescript copy of Campbell's recommendation for the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). Twenty years ago I taught myself to type by transcribing as many of the 8th Battalion recommendations as I could find. It's important to note that for a junior officer to get the DSO it would be for very high levels of heroism. In fact for a Lieutenant or Captain it was second only to the VC (24/2/2009)."



Group photo of officers at officer training school, January – February 1917. Above left. Capt. Henry Lascelles KG, DSO, CdeG, MiD. Below right. Capt Gerald Evans MC, MiD (27/8/1917).

It was obvious the Gerald in his own right or with friends and comrades like Capt Alec Campbell DSO, Capt Joseph Booth MC, CMG, Capt Austin Mahony MC, MiD, Capt James Hurrey MiD, Lieut Richard Andrewartha MC, MiD, Cpl Frank Dwyer MM and Capt Percy Lay M.C., D.C.M., M.M., C. de G., that Gerald had earned the respect and friendship of a very elite band of brothers. Post war Capt Lascelles followed his birth right becoming the 6th Earl of Harewood in 1929. In 1922 he also married Mary, Princess Royal, the daughter of King George V and Queen Mary. Their first son was George Henry Hubert Lascelles, 7th Earl of Harewood (1923-2011) which followed the families naming tradition. Their second son was called The Hon. Gerald David Lascelles (1924-1998). This was the first time the family had used the names Gerald or David as the christian names for a child. The message that was communicated to the Evans family, presumably by an agent or a member of the Lascelles family sometime in the mid 1920's, was that The Hon. Gerald David Lascelles "was named after a very brave Australian Captain who was killed in 1917." This was clearly one very brave and honourable man's final tribute to another. As the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180), a warrior and philosopher pronounced in his "Meditations," "What we do now echoes in eternity."

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