

# Sergeant William Walter Atkinson Fox

Born 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1889 – Died 24<sup>th</sup> August 1952

3<sup>rd</sup> Field Company Engineers

SN: 6400



2017 Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize

Yorketown Area School

Jessica Timms

## FOREWORD

*In these pages I will endeavour to give a fair account of my experience since I enlisted in the A.I.F. in August 1915 to any who it may interest. I will try to describe places I have seen, countries I have travelled through and my life generally since that time, and anything that, to my mind, will interest others.*

*William W. Fox*

W.W.A. Fox  
3rd Field Company Engineers  
Australian Imperial Force

16 Aug 1915

On the 25th of April 1915, the spirit of a nation was born with the landing of the first ANZAC troops. This was the beginning of the ANZAC legend. These troops came to symbolise the qualities that Australians value and strive for. They have come to define the Australian character and have been at its core for the past 100 years, getting the nation through times of hardship and distress. It is this spirit that my Great, Great Grandfather William Fox upheld in World War One.

William was born on the 22 February 1889, in Goroke, Victoria, where his parents Alfred John Fox and Annie Georgina Fox had previously purchased land. After residing in Goroke, the family moved to Casterton, Victoria, a small rural town located 43 kilometres east of the South Australian border. His father, Alfred was a “much-

*esteemed citizen, who took a lively interest in any movement for the good of the town, being secretary of the progress association, public hospital and fathers association”* (Fox, 1926) his parents, set him up for a life of accomplishments and taught him the true meaning of hard work and success.

Goroke, parish of Goroke, county of Lowan.—In the township. Upset price £4 per lot. Lot 53, area 2r., allotment 5, section 3.—Alfred John Fox, £4. Lot 54, area 2r., allotment 6, section 3.—Alfred John Fox, £4. Lot 55, area 2r., allotment 7, section 3.—Alfred John Fox, £4. Lot 56, area 2r., allotment 8, section 3.—Alfred John Fox, £4. Lot 57, area 2r., allotment 9, section 3. £6 10s. Lot 58, area 2r., allotment 10, section 3.—James Brake, £4.

William, along with his brother and three sisters, attended the Casterton State School, later known as the Casterton Primary School. Here they were taught under the rule of Head Teacher Mr J. H. Brown. After his schooling, William moved to Mount Gambier to pursue a career in carpentry, and it was here that he met his wife, Muriel Mary Fox.

**A** 15th Rifle's  
15th Field Coy Eng

**ITALIAN MILITARY FORCES.**  
**AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.**  
**ATTESTATION PAPER OF PERSONS ENLISTED FOR SERVICE ABROAD**

No. *4100* Name *FOX William Walter*  
Unit *3rd Field Coy Eng* Date *1/1/15*

Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.

1. What is your Name? *William Walter Fox*
2. In the Parish of *Groby* in the County of *Victoria*
3. Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalised British Subject? (N.B. If the latter, papers to be shown.) *No*
4. What is your age? *26 1/2 years*
5. What is your trade or calling? *Carpenter*
6. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? If so, where, to whom, and for what period? *No*
7. Are you married? *No*
8. Who is your next of kin? (Address to be stated) *Mr. Walter Fox, 100, St. James's Street, Melbourne, Victoria*
9. Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power? *No*
10. Have you ever been discharged from any part of His Majesty's Service, with ignominy or as incapable of being employed in the Imperial or Commonwealth Forces, or as a person of a bad character? *No*
11. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy, or Colonial Forces? If so, state which, and if not now serving, state cause of discharge. *No*
12. Have you ever been rejected on any of your previous service? *No*
13. Have you ever been rejected on any of your previous service? *No*
14. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy, or Colonial Forces? If so, state which, and if not now serving, state cause of discharge. *No*
15. Are you required by any law, regulation, or contract to perform any other service? *No*

*William Walter Fox* solemnly declares that the above answers made by me in the above questions are true, and I am willing and desirous to serve in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

Witness my hand and seal this *1st* day of *January* 1915 at *Melbourne*

*William W.A. Fox*  
Signature of Person Enlisted.

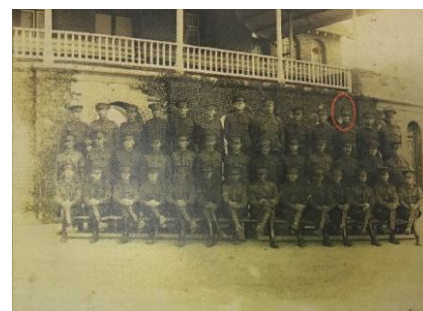
*1/1/15*  
Date

\* This form should be kept up to the date of attestation and is not to be used for any other purpose.  
† This form must be filled in by the person enlisting and is not to be filled in by any other person.

William's enlistment form

On August 26th 1915, William answered the call for able men, selflessly volunteering in Adelaide, South Australia, at the age of 27. William sacrificed the new life he was making for himself in Mount Gambier with his wife in order to serve his country. In doing so, he began to display the courage of the ANZACs, as he had no previous experience in the A.I.F.

He was posted to the 3rd Field Company Engineers as a Sapper, a field much encompassing of his carpentry expertise.



3<sup>rd</sup> Field Company Engineers

William embarked from Sydney on the 21st of March 1916 aboard the 'ARMADALE'

*"It was with a little tight feeling around the heart that we left Australian Shores, with the feeling that perhaps some of us may never see it again. However, our spirits kept up and we cheered and sang out until we were out too far"* (Fox 2009 p. 8)



The Armadale



The pyramids at Egypt

He disembarked at Alexandria, Egypt and joined miscellaneous reinforcements at Tel-El-Kebir on 24th April 1916. On the 10th of May 1916 he embarked from Alexandria overseas aboard the ship "Caledonian" as reinforcements for 1st Division. In June 1916 he arrived in Marseilles, France and was transported by train, a 55-hour trip, to Etaples. Here he underwent rigorous training to prepare him for the inevitable, the frontline. However, nothing could have prepared him for the horrors that were to come.

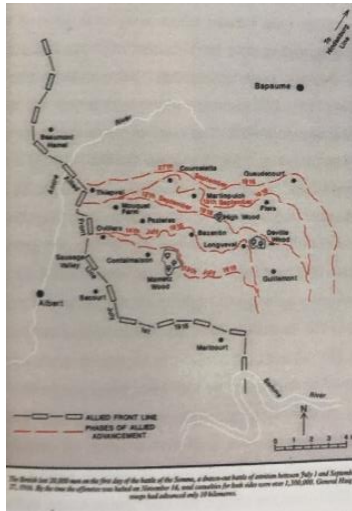
His first major encounter at the frontline was the Battle of Pozieres. The attack began at 10am on the 20th of July 1916. Australian troops took over this battle from the depleted British armed forces. William's company assisted in the capturing of the village of Pozieres, they



Taken before first encounter at the Front

helped turn the German parapet and make strong posts behind their advancing comrades. They brought life back to the bleak battle field and created a strong offense using their willpower, determination and fearlessness. The division gained every objective and clung to its gains despite almost continuous artillery fire, complete darkness, heavy shelling and repeated German counter-attacks.

*"For men thrown into the fighting at Pozieres the experience was simply hell"* (Burness, n.d.)



The Germans concentrated the majority of their artillery on the ANZACS, resulting in many casualties from the start. Attacks went in, some ground was taken, and then the enemy would counter-attack. But no matter what, the troops persisted, sometimes having to walk over the dead bodies of their fallen comrades, they endured and moved forward, representing the ANZAC spirit magnificently. Through this persistence and their ability to quite literally 'soldier on' they captured the village.

*"It would do the people at home good if they could've seen these boys of Australia going into it; every face had a smile even though they knew it was a tough job"* (Fox 2009 p.40)

Front line at Pozieres

The Battle of Pozieres is considered to be one of the four hardest battles ever fought by Australian troops. In a period of seven weeks, three Australian divisions had lost 23,000 troops, comparable to that of Gallipoli.

*"...and what a slaughter it was, places like Sausage Gully gained their names because of the amount of men chopped about in this gully"* (Fox 2009 p.36).



Soldiers having tea at Sausage Gully

The capture of Pozieres was a significant achievement, but an achievement that came with great loss.

General Walker addressed William's company after the battle *"well lads I must congratulate you on the good work you have done in the recent fighting, you have done well, you have had a good many casualties but of course that is what you are here for, I may have to ask you to do a bit more but there is one consolation, I don't think you can get it any hotter than you have had it. But take my advice, rest yourselves, put plenty of 'dubbin' on your boots, and may god bless you; goodbye"* (Fox 2009 p.40-41)

But the war wasn't all about the effect you had upon the opposition, it was also about the impact you had on your fellow comrades, that is why good humour and mateship are essential in the ANZAC spirit. On August 15<sup>th</sup>, William ignored protocol, displaying the healthy disrespect of authority that ANZACS occasionally exhibited, to bandage a fellow comrade who had been hit by shrapnel in seven different places. This act of mateship, bravery and selflessness left him open to gunfire and bombing and he was lucky to have left with his life. William always seemed to make fun out of an otherwise harsh situation, if it was so cold that there was snow and ice he would start a snowball fight *"a great day was spent by all the boys fighting some great battles with snowballs, and with the slipping and snowballing and laughing, one almost forgot there was a war on for a while"* (Fox 2009 p. 59). He often recounted on the good humour of himself and his mates *"it was very wet and dark when we arrived but we were all in good humour"* (Fox 2009 p.97) and when one of his closest friends was killed in action he wrote a touching poem in his memory.

*"I felt the death of my mate very much and have not been able to rest. He was a fine lad"* (Fox 2009 p. 122)

*To my dear comrade and pal Dave who was killed in action on May 30<sup>th</sup> 1918*

*Free from this land of trouble  
Free from this land of toil  
Fought and died a soldier's death  
And rests under foreign soil*

*A pal we all was proud of  
Noble and brave and true  
But is memory lives forever  
As all good soldiers do*

*Always a thought for others  
Always a cheerie smile  
And to look on the bright side  
It was always his style*

*We miss him yes we miss him  
More than words can tell  
This Nobel hearted pal of ours  
Who for his country fell*

*But one thing helps to cheer us  
When we think of all the slain  
That if they died for victory  
They did not die in vain*

*Ease for all our heartaches  
Only in prayer we find  
But all our silent prayers are for  
the loved ones left behind*

*may good be with them always  
the loved ones that are home  
and may he rest our comrade's soul  
up in his heavenly throne*

(Fox 2009 p. 123)

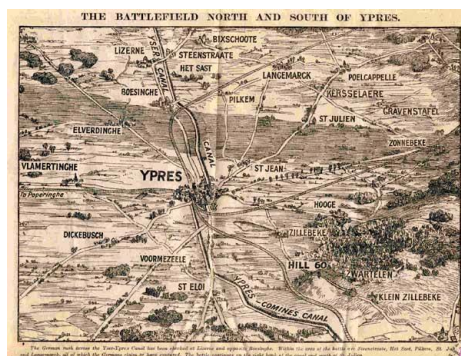


William stayed on the front line for a further two years, assisting in any way he could. He displayed many ANZAC qualities, any soldier would have required courage, endurance, persistence, humour and mateship to withstand the horrific conditions William was exposed to. While on the front, he experienced unimaginable surroundings, constant shelling and machine gun fire. Here, boots and food were in short supply, and cold nights and long days were a regular appearance *“we have had no rations for two days and don’t expect we will get any till tonight, we are living on tea, everywhere outside is mud and slush and it’s impossible to keep our feet dry”* (Fox 2009 p. 52).



Deep mud in a trench

Many men suffered from trench foot and shell shock *“and the mud.... Don’t talk about it. It’s a foot deep everywhere and if a man should happen to put his foot in a shell hole, he would go down past his knees”* (Fox 2009 p.52). From nearly being buried to seeing your mate die, the trenches were a place of extremes.



Map which includes Zillebeck dugouts

From here the company moved onwards to help out at the Zillebeck dugouts. *“We all knew were going to take part in a great stunt within a few hours, and that some of us would no doubt go under, but we joked and laughed and if anyone was down hearted he never showed it”* (Fox 2009 p.80). At 5:00am on the 28th of September 1917, the order came to move forward. The 11th Battalion took up the first line, the 12th the second and the 9th and 10th the third and the 3rd Field Company Engineers followed closely behind making strong points. It was one of the biggest

concentrations of artillery ever known, the hills were lit up with flashes, the ground rocked with vibrations, machine guns and snipers were constantly firing. It was described as being ‘hell on earth’. The German barrage was extremely strong *“when I looked ahead and saw what we had to go through I said to myself ‘goodbye to half of us here, it was an awful sight. Dead lay about everywhere”* (Fox 2009 p. 80) However, Will’s company got through the barrage with only one casualty. In one day, 1300 prisoners were taken and they had advanced around 1 ½ miles.

While enduring horrendous conditions William could still appreciate his surroundings, often commenting on the ‘lovely’, ‘picturesque’ and ‘beautiful’ landscape they were traveling through. *“...a pretty and interesting place, I enjoyed the time spent here and had some good laughs at the French people’s expense”* (Fox 2009 p. 46). He would enquire about how things were made, his intuitive nature surviving the horrors of war. Will would often comment on how lucky he was to be given this experience and talk about the generosity of the French people, *“most interesting and educating trips I have had yet”* (Fox 2009 p.16).

Will's only respite was a short leave in England where he visited relatives and took in the sights. When he returned, his company was straight back into building bridges; they broke the record for building the fastest bridge ever recorded, taking only 7 minutes and 55 seconds. They also helped in creating strong points, digging dugouts and constructing railways.

On the 10th of November 1918, fire ceased and soldiers rejoiced, for now the time for going home was near - *"we sing, laugh, everyone wears a smile, it is a great time and we are all thankful that the terrible slaughter is finished, we all feel thankful to god that we have been spared to see the end"* (Fox 2009 p.152).

However, even after the war was over William stayed in France as an instructor in an AIF carpentry school, this shows his dedication and commitment to this country, and demonstrated him going above and beyond the call for duty.

Finally, now ranked "Sergeant", he returned to Australia aboard the "Nestor" disembarking on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1919. He was welcomed home warmly by his loving family who had missed him dearly.

**Fox Bros.' Premises Sold**  
Fox Bros. premises in Commercial Street, near the Odeon Theatre, have been sold at an undisclosed figure to Mr. O. E. Bodey. Final details of the sale are dependent on finalising probate and other matters associated with the will of the late Mr. W. W. Fox. The premises were offered at auction last February when they were passed in at £9,500.

William Fox survived the challenges of war in great spirit, he went on to raise five healthy boys. Will was very intuitive and entrepreneurial so it was no surprise when he successfully established his own family run business.

**THANKS**  
To Mount Gambier Fire Brigade: WE WISH TO express our sincere admiration for, and gratitude to, the Fire Brigade, for the incredible speed, and efficiency, with which they attend and extinguished the fire in our premises on Tuesday night. And to Mrs. Eric Fox who so promptly discovered the fire and notified the Brigade.  
E. A. FOX.  
W. W. FOX.

He once again answered the call during the Second World War but due to ill health was constrained.

#### DEATHS

**FOX**—On August 24, at Hospital, Adelaide, William Walter Atkinson, of 27 Helen Street, Mount Gambier, dearly beloved husband of Muriel Mary Fox, loved father of Melville, Laurie, Bruce, Graham, and Jeffrey. Aged 63 years. The friends of the late Mr. William Walter Atkinson Fox, of Helen Street, Mount Gambier, are respectfully informed that his remains were peacefully laid to rest in the Mount Gambier Cemetery this (Tuesday) afternoon. ERN JAMES, Phone 281, Funeral Director.

Sadly, William succumbed to cancer on the 24 of August 1952 he was buried in the Mount Gambier Cemetery next to his father. His son Melville served during the Second World War and his grandson, John (my grandfather) served duty in Vietnam, continuing the family legacy.

I feel honoured to call William my Great, Great Grandfather and believe he is truly incredible. The spirit he displayed on the battlefield was unique and true. I hope his story is never lost, I know I will always remember it.

[illegible]

2

CERTIFICATE OF ATTESTING OFFICER.

—

The foregoing questions were read to the person enlisted in my presence.

I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to by him.

I have examined his naturalization papers and am of opinion that they are  
~~correct.~~

(This to be struck out except in the case of persons who are naturalized British Subjects.)

Date SEP 8 1915 E. E. Hatch, Lieut.  
Signature of Attesting Officer.

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OATH TO BE TAKEN BY PERSON BEING ENLISTED.\*

—

I, William Walter Atkinson Fox, swear that I will well and truly serve our Sovereign Lord the King in the Australian Imperial Force from SEP 8 1915 until the end of the War, and a further period of four months thereafter unless sooner lawfully discharged, dismissed or removed therefrom; and that I will resist His Majesty's enemies and cause His Majesty's peace to be kept and maintained; and that I will in all matters appertaining to my service, faithfully discharge my duty according to law.

SO HELP ME GOD.

William W. A. Fox  
Signature of Person Enlisted.

Taken and subscribed at Adelaide in  
the State of SA Australia  
this SEP 8 1915 day \_\_\_\_\_ of  
\_\_\_\_\_ 19\_\_\_\_, before me—

E. E. Hatch, Lieut.  
Signature of Attesting Officer.

\* A person enlisting who objects to taking an oath may make an affirmation in accordance with the Third Schedule of the Act and the above form must be amended accordingly. All amendments must be initialled by the Attesting Officer.

[illegible][illegible]



# In tribute to those who gave all for our peace

## A FAMILY OF HEROES



**GUNNER MELVILLE FOX**  
Father



**SERGEANT MELVILLE FOX**  
Son



**COLONEL FREDERICK JOHN HENRY HOWLAND**  
Grandchild



FOURTH-GENERATION SOLDIER: John Fox can trace his family military history back to the Boer War. Picture: MIKE BURTON

**MICHAEL MCGUIRE**

FOUR John Fox, Remembrance Day carries a lot more meaning than it does for most. The recently retired RAAF Squadron Leader in the fourth generation of his family, is a direct descendant of a family of soldiers.

His great-grandfather, Gunner Melville Fox, fought in the Boer War in 1900. His grandfather, William Fox, was an engineer building trenches on the Western Front in World War I. And his father, Melville Fox, was a gunner in the 21st Field Regiment and served in New Guinea and Borneo in World War II.

"I was very aware of my family history, where they had been and what they had achieved," Mr Fox said.

"I guess I always agreed to that sort of career."

Mr Fox, now 67, joined the army in 1970 as a 16-year-old. Two years later, he was in Vietnam, serving as an armoured personnel carrier in the 1st Cavalry Regiment. In 1968, he was in the battle to repel the North Vietnamese Tet offensive, one of the war's biggest campaigns. He left the country soon after, but returned for a second tour of duty in 1970.

The "overall experience was, shall we say, soul building," he said with understatement. "We served with a lot of great blokes."

## HERO BACKS PAY DEAL

VICTORIA Cross recipient Sgt Robert Smith has defended the renege pay deal for soldiers, saying the latest offer is a "good deal".

"The contract we had just had two years ago was a very good deal," he said. "I understand what it's like to be a soldier. You don't get paid a lot of money, but you're there when you need to be."

Soldiers will receive a 1.5 per cent increase every year for three years, an effective pay cut while the ADF is deploying to the Middle East, the deal announced.

"I understand what it's like to be a soldier. You don't get paid a lot of money, but you're there when you need to be," he said.

Mr Fox left the army in 1977, but returned to the military in 1986 because he "missed it", but thought he'd try a different branch and signed with the air force.

His second career would see him serve in Somalia and on several humanitarian and disaster relief operations, including the Indonesian Islands, before retiring from the military in December.

Mr Fox also said Remembrance Day should still serve as a "wake-up call" to all Australians not to forget the sacrifices made by Australians on all battlefields.

Remembrance Day for me is a stark reminder of the trauma and sacrifice my family perhaps has gone through. Not only my family, but all people who have served in all wars."



William with his family



William's medals from the war

Transferred to  
**AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.**

No. 6400  
Rank Sgt Name FOX, W. W. A.  
Unit 3rd Hh Coy Engrs  
Casualty

By to check for "B" Notes - undated 10/10/19  
G. B. S. 10/10/19 - 1st Lt. 10/10/19 - 1st Lt. 10/10/19  
Returned to service 10/10/19 - 1st Lt. 10/10/19  
Discharged 10/10/19 - 1st Lt. 10/10/19

DATE 10/10/19 FORM 100 Replaced  
M. G. E. advised returned to service, Temp. 10/10/19

WAR HISTORY INDEX  
10/10/19 Discharged - M. D.

STAR  
VICTORY  
10/10/19

Discharge form

3

Description of William Walter Robinson Fox on Enlistment

Age <u>26</u> years <u>6</u> months	DISTINCTIVE MARKS.
Height <u>5</u> feet <u>9</u> inches	<u>Vis. R. E. L. 66</u>
Weight <u>145</u> lbs.	<u>face NIL</u>
Chest Measurement <u>34 1/2</u> inches	
Complexion <u>Dark</u>	
Eyes <u>Grey</u>	
Hair <u>Dark</u>	
Religious Denomination <u>C of Eng.</u>	

CERTIFICATE OF MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

I HAVE examined the above-named person, and find that he does not present any of the following conditions, viz.:-

Scrofula; phthisis; syphilis; impaired constitution; defective intelligence; defects of vision, voice, or hearing; hernia; hemorrhoids; varicose veins, beyond a limited extent; marked varicocele with unusually pendent testicle; inveterate cutaneous disease; chronic ulcers; traces of corporal punishment; or evidence of having been marked with the letters D. or B.C.; contracted or deformed chest; abnormal curvature of spine; or any other disease or physical defect calculated to unfit him for the duties of a soldier.

He can see the required distance with either eye; his heart and lungs are healthy; he has the free use of his joints and limbs; and he declares he is not subject to fits of any description.

I consider him fit for active service.

Date 24. 8. 15.  
Place Adelaide

Signature of Examining Medical Officer. G. Coburn J.A.M.C.

CERTIFICATE OF COMMANDING OFFICER.

I CERTIFY that this Attestation of the above named person is correct, and that the required forms have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to 6 Coy Rept 6 Reinforcement

Date 8. 9. 15  
Place Adelaide

Commanding 2nd BATTALION A.I.F. LY. COL. CAMP. COMMANDANT

Medical examination form

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