

## **4189 SERGEANT Thomas Edward EADES**

Thomas Eades was born and bred at Hastings in New Zealand prior to moving to Australia in 1899 when he was aged 16; upon his arrival in Victoria he quickly learnt the differences between venomous and non-venomous snakes. Having learnt these skills Tom became quite adept at handling the reptiles and soon took to giving public demonstrations in different suburbs around Melbourne. While travelling to Tamba Springs near Bamba (to replenish their supply of snakes), Tom and a colleague stopped at a swamp and while there a group of Hindu hawkers observed them, the hawkers referred to Tom as Pambo – the “great snake man”.



Sensing that this mystique could assist him, Tom adopted this title; he dressed in eastern clothes and painted his exposed skin brown, and called himself Pambo. Some of ‘Pambo’s’ favourite show places were the St Kilda foreshore and Bourke Street in the city, so realistic was his act that it apparently would often fool Indians who witnessed his act.

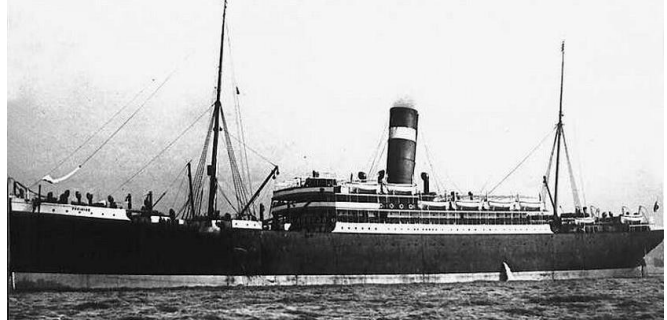
When he enlisted on 22 July 1915 Tom described himself as being married (he had married Florence in 1913), by now he was 30 years old age, quite rightly so, he described himself as a snake expert. Tom took his stock to the Melbourne Zoo for safe keeping while he was to be away overseas serving. Tom and Florence had two children, Ralph and Theresa, unfortunately Florence died at Box Hill on 11 August 1915, while Tom was still training. Tom continued to serve, his son Ralph now became his next-of-kin, Tom left his children in the care of his late wife’s mother.

Private Thomas Eades carried most of his training at the Ascot Vale camp, initially he was allotted to the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion and then to the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but finally sailed as part of the 13<sup>th</sup> reinforcements for the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion. That draft of 150 men sailed from Melbourne on 20 December 1915. In a later statement Tom stated that he played the bagpipes in the army, but looking at his file no formal verification of that can be made, his claim is probably correct because the Anzac Provost Corps did have had a bagpipes band, at least during the first few months of its existence. Tom is probably one of the pipers shown below, the photo is from Abbassia (see paragraph below).



Private Eades most probably never joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which by the time Tom arrived in Egypt would have returned to a camp in Egypt following the Gallipoli evacuation. With the call for volunteers for the Anzac Provost Corps Private Eades stepped forward, and despite a lack of active service he was accepted. The nucleus of the Corps formed at a large camp at **Abbassia**, most of the men officially taken on strength on 3 April 1916.

By early August 1916 the bulk of the men were deemed as being appropriately and adequately trained to undertake duties as military policemen. The training had weeded out most of the men that were not suited to the role, most returned to their original units to soldier on. Some of the men were sent directly to France to bolster numbers there.



Eades was part of the large contingent that was sent to England aboard the *Tunisian* (shown right) on 3 August 1916. These men were sent to Tidworth where the Australian Military Police in the U.K. would concentrate its duties and from now on its training.



In early December 1916 a large number of men were sent from Tidworth to take up duties in France. Trooper Eades joined Trooper's Booter, Martin and Stark in taking up duties with the 4<sup>th</sup> Divisional MMP Detachment. Tom would remain with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division MMP for the remainder of the war.

Tom remained in reasonable health while on the Western Front; however after his arrival at the 4<sup>th</sup> Division MMP he did have to be admitted to hospital suffering from piles (not an unusual ailment for mounted troops). Towards the end of 1917 and then again in 1918, Tom became eligible for two weeks leave in the U.K.



policemen.

Trooper Eades remained with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division even after the signing of the armistice in November 1918. In mid-March Tom was formally mentioned in despatch, no formal wording of the despatch has been seen to date, but Trooper Samuel Frost and SSM Wilkinson were mentioned in the same despatch.

In May 1919 Trooper Eades was transferred back to Tidworth where he was posted for duty, he in fact spent most of 1919 in the U.K. Tom appears to have spent most of 1919 at the Warminster detachment. Tom is shown to the left from 1919, the other men are also military

It was not until early December 1919 that Tom was given a passage back to Australia aboard the *Shropshire* (shown **right**). Thomas Eades was formally discharged from the AIF on 21 April 1920.



Upon his return to civilian life Tom resumed his interest in snakes; his alter ego of Pambo appears to have also been resurrected (at least to some extent). In 1921 Tom married Irene Madigan, and by 1924 Tom and his second wife had three children, Leslie, John and Raymond. 1924 shows Tom and Irene living in Collins Street, Northcote, at that time Tom was described as a manufacturer.

#### DEMONSTRATION AT ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS.



As can be seen from the photo left from that year Tom was definitely involved in his passion for snakes, now on staff at the Melbourne Zoo. The captioning for the photo from the *The Argus* (Melbourne) in December 1924 states; *After a trip to the Murray, Mr Thomas Eade, the snake expert of the Zoological Gardens returned with 35 fine specimens for the reptile*

*house, nearly all of the tiger species.*

During the holiday periods at the Zoo, Tom would give demonstrations to the public on the handling of Tiger snakes. It would appear that around 1928 Tom's focus changed, when Dr Neil Hamilton-Fairley (ex-AIF) and Dr Charles Kellaway (also ex-AIF) started to employ Tom's services as the pair researched snake venom. Tom collected the snakes, cared for them and milked them.





The photo to the left is from the *Canberra Times* from January 1929, the photo is captioned;

*“PAMBO”*

*Otherwise known as Thomas Eades, Melbourne Zoo snake expert, who is catching snakes for Melbourne Hospital to help research into snake poisoning. He caught sixty at Tallangatta recently.*

The photo to the right (above) comes from *The Argus* from March 1930, it shows Tom’s cat playing with a snake. In the early 1930’s Tom was employed by the Walter and Eliza Hall Institutes as a full-time assistant to Dr Kellaway. In 1935 Tom became the keeper of reptiles at the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories.

Various sources state that Tom was probably bitten over forty times during his career. Although initially he had a strong resistance to tiger snake venom, this gradually tapered off, and during the 1930’s he had several bites that required anti-venom and saw him placed on the critical list in hospital a number of times.

In 1936 Tom applied for copyright on an instructive leaflet he produced, entitled; “First Aid Treatment of Snake Bite” (this 3 page leaflet is viewable on-line at the NAA). Many snakebites and regular inhaling of powdered venom led to Tom developing asthma in later life. Tom was eventually forced to wear a mask while working with reptiles and in later years developed a serious reaction to snake skin – he died from asthma in Melbourne in 1942.

Footnote: Thanks to Heather Ford (Frev) for her assistance in preparing this article. Photos and some article details have been sourced through *Trove*.

