A World War One Soldiers story – Biography

William Henry Flynn was born around January 1884 in Adelaide, South Australia, and continued to grow up there. Although not marrying or having any children of his own, he was known to have a married sister, who went by the name of Mrs Johnson. William was a Labourer, which meant he did unskilled manual work for wages. He was brave and committed to his life, which may not have seemed to be the most comfortable living style. Despite this, he was constantly trying hard to make money for a living to stay alive and well. His complexion could be described as him to have dark skin, with black hair and grey/blueish eyes. He had a height of 5 feet and 5 inches, and a weight of 144 pounds, which indicates his small size.

William enlisted in the war at the age of 27, on the 15th of December 1914 in Oaklands, South Australia. This was a risk to his life and shows the bravery of himself, as he willingly gave up on his safe lifestyle to serve his country. He was declared fit for active service the next day. He was placed into the 10th Battalion, in the third reinforcement, and given the regimental number of 1462. The rank he was given was a private, meaning the lowest rank in the war. Along with other soldiers in his battalion, he embarked on the HMAT A54 *Runic*, on the 19th of February 1915. They landed in Egypt, and that’s where they started to train for battle.

His battalion was then moved straight into Gallipoli, during August 1915. William was then presumably moved into the front line, as one of the first soldiers to exit the boats. Because of this, he received a bullet wound to the face on the 7 of August. The shock and pain that resided from this injury left William traumatised by the war, as he was admitted to the 3rd Field Ambulance, from which he was transferred several times, to the 1st Casualty clearing station, then Mudros in Greece, and thence back to Egypt in the city of Alexandria on the 11th, and was admitted to the 1st Australian General Hospital. He stayed recovering in Heliopolis for the day, and was then transferred to the 4th Auxiliary Hospital, then back to the 1st Australian General Hospital on the 21st of August, and finally to the Overseas base, on the 13 of September. All of this moving around would have been difficult for William, as the pain of the injury plus stress of his whereabouts would have made it almost impossible to cope with.

Unfortunately, all the stress became too much for William, and he escaped the hospital to go absent without leave from 9pm to 10:15 pm, on the 15th of September 1915. Because of this, he was confined to the barracks for 7 days. After this, the fear of returning to war was so severe that William continued to try for a second time to go absent without leave. This was just three days later, on the 18th. He was found guilty and yet again awarded 7 days confined to the barracks, as he was absent from the Defaulters Parade, which had a mandatory attendance.

After finally starting to recover from both his bullet wound and his stress, William re-joined his battalion in Gallipoli on the 4th of October 1915. The harsh conditions from the trenches and the poor health of his fellow soldiers led William to a nasty case of gastritis. He managed to re-join the battles shortly after, and only had to stay three days in yet another hospital on the 22nd of October, which was the 2nd Light Horse Field Ambulance.

Unfortunately, William was extremely vulnerable towards unwanted health issues, and he contracted a fever, which ended up becoming the mumps. This caused him to be admitted to the 2nd Field Ambulance back in Mudros, on the 11th of December, then transferred to the 3rd Australian General Hospital on the 23rd, and finally discharged to duty back in Gallipoli on that same day.

Not long after this, all the Australian soldiers were ordered to evacuate Gallipoli, so William, who was finally well enough to fight again, was forced to leave on the 29th of December 1915. He travelled back to Egypt along with his weary companions and resided for a while in Tel el Kebir. Due to all the worry and stress from his illnesses and battles, William went absent without leave again on the 7th of January, and was awarded 14 days of detention, whilst also not receiving pay for 3 days.

In February 1916, soldiers of the 10th battalion was moved off into different battalions, due to the battalion being taken on strength. This was because people wanted to essentially ‘double the AIF’, which meant they wanted to create 4th and 5th divisions. William was transferred into the 50th battalion, which had just been created.

Not long after, he was found guilty of overstaying his leave on the 19th of March 1916, until giving himself up to the Piquet after two days. All of the worry and anxiety that was left in him after Gallipoli forced him to try to escape and find freedom yet again. This left him with 168 hours in detention and he was forfeited 2 days’ pay under the Royal Warrant.

Finally, after missing out on the battles of the Western Front due to his hospitalisations and days in detention, William finally had to return home after contracting valvular heart disease. He had been admitted to the 2nd Australian Stationary Hospital in Tel el Kebir, on the 19th of May 1916, originally having aortic valve disease. He was then discharged and admitted to Hospital Train three days later, but then transferred again to the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital, on the 10th of June, where valvular heart disease was the confirmed illness. This may have been caused by the physical demands of trench warfare in his time during the battles, as many soldiers were confirmed with similar illnesses after experiencing these horrors.

All the hospital movement was tiring for William, and he dreamed of when he could finally return home to Australia. This day eventually came true, and he commenced his return onboard the HT ‘Clan McGillivray’ on the 10th of July 1916. He then disembarked Melbourne five days later and was discharged as being medically unfit in Adelaide on the 26th of September. After all the hardships and illnesses that William experienced, his war journey was finally over.

Once William had returned home, he discovered his application for a war pension that had been filled out on the 5th of August 1916, had been approved. This was because of the extensive list of injuries and illnesses that he experienced during his service time. The payment was either a weekly system or a one-off big sum payment. The relief of finally getting something good out of his tough times during the war made William feel satisfied with himself, and he went on to live a comfortable life back home in Australia.

On the 3rd of July 1952, William Henry Flynn died in his hometown, Adelaide. He was 67 years old. His grave is located in the AIF Cemetery (Row 16, Grave 39), in West Terrace, Adelaide. We can all learn about Williams ANZAC spirit that he played out during his time in the war, as he was resilient and managed to keep on fighting during some of the toughest times in his life.