

Private Robert Bethune Burton

SN 848

World War 1 Gallipoli Campaign
1915-1916



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Robert B Burton served in the Gallipoli campaign, returning to Australia to be medically discharged in 1916. The lives of his family were impacted heavily, but proudly, by the war and that pride is shown by his descendants today.

Robert was born in the idyllic surrounds of Chain of Ponds in the Adelaide Hills. His father, Robert Burton and his mother, Elizabeth Bethune, were both pioneering families in the area. They married in the Flinders Street, Baptist Church in Adelaide in 1885. Together they raised a family of 11 children and ran the Chain of Ponds Post Office and general store.

Robert Bethune Burton was the fourth child and second son born on the 5th October in 1892. When war broke out Bob was motor driving along the rough roads, long used to horse and cart traffic, of the Adelaide Hills. This may have encouraged him to enlist early on the 30th of July 1914. Bob had not long celebrated his 22nd birthday.

After entering camp at Oaklands, Bob was allocated to the 9th Light Horse and embarked with the 4th reinforcements on the 1st of April 1915 aboard the HMAT "Port Lincoln". Bob then proceeded to join the forces at Gallipoli on the 22nd of May 1915. By December Bob was suffering with kidney disease and was admitted first to hospital in Lemnos and then transferred to Heliopolis, before embarking on the 'Argylshire' hospital ship to return home on the 3rd of March 1916. Bob received his medical discharge on the 20th July 1916.

While Bob was away his younger brother, Keith Altore Burton, enlisted in June 1915, not long before his 21st birthday. Altore served as a bombardier with the 49th Battery and returned home safely.

Bob's elder brother, and the first born in the family, had left home much earlier. William ventured to Victoria and later settled in Tasmania, raising a family of 5 before joining up in February 1917. With only 6 weeks of hostilities remaining in the war, William was shot and killed by an enemy sniper while William was gallantly carrying an injured soldier to safety.

On his return to Chain of Ponds, Bob was presented with a plaque, painted by Mr W Seppelt, that included all the names of the local community in sincere appreciation of his service and welcome return.

Bob had a lifelong love of horses, and it is hardly surprising that he rode his horse to ask permission to marry Marjorie Downs LANE, with the simple declaration to her father;

"We have to get married.....because I love her"

As a returned soldier Bob was allocated a farming settlement at Wall Flat in the River Murray. The land was not suitable and many settlers abandoned their allotments. Bob became a Water Joey and settled at Cobdogla to raise a family of four; Eunice, Doreen, Winifred and Harding.

The responsibilities of a Water Joey required the Joey to rise early to raise the sluice gates to flood each farming block with the allocated water during the allocation process. Each block was irrigated separately for a couple of days before water was available to the next block. Popular produce at the time were grapes, tomatoes and pumpkins and other seasonal vegetables. When opening the channels, Bob would need to clean out the concrete bulkheads of debris and the many snakes that would take up residence. It was the produce grown in the Riverland that enabled the cannery to commence during World War II to support the diggers overseas. Poppies were also grown to develop morphine for the troops.

Bob and Marjorie were very active in the community of the Riverland. Bob's grandsons would often accompany him on his rounds of the channel country. They recall that Bob would stop and chat with everyone. Sometimes for hours. These chats could have been about the water allocations and farming or even the tennis club and local dances that Bob and Marjorie participated in. In all likelihood the subject of horses would have been broached once or twice. Bob had owned several horses and loved to race the trotters. Bob was never shy to put his money where his mouth was.

On the 20th of March 1963 Bob had been visiting with his daughter Wynne and her family in Adelaide. Bob had been to the races, came home for tea, and was preparing to go to the local trots.

Full of life, Full of heart, Bob died that evening.

Two days later, Bob's family gathered at the Barmera Cemetery to lay him to rest, reunited with his daughter Doreen who had died as a child 40 years earlier.

Bob is remembered as a gentle man, who was never upset or ruffled. Without the need of alcohol or cigarettes he went about his life whistling, enjoying what the pleasures of a country life had to offer in his Cobdogla and Riverland community. Sharing his love of fishing for Murray Cod and rabbiting with his grandchildren.

Bob is remembered by his daughter in law, Mary Burton of Bonney Lodge Aged Care in Barmera.

And his grandchildren and great grandchildren;

Marilyn, Ronald, Anne, Sandy and Neil and their families in the Riverland.

Bruce and Robert MacGregor and their families of Adelaide.

John, Michael, Paul and Anne Howell and their families.