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Life

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Anzac tribute – remembering Private William Cammack

By PETER MCLADY

■ Peter McLady has traced the stories behind and visited the graves of all those remembered on the Stanthorpe First World War Memorial who are buried or listed on a memorial, in France, Belgium, Germany, Malta and Turkey. He has laid a wreath for each of these soldiers who did not return.

To commemorate each of these young men, the Stanthorpe Border Post will run their story on the 100th anniversary of their deaths.

WILLIAM Cammack was one of the first men ashore at Anzac Cove on the morning of April 15, 1915. He had previously suffered a fractured skull during the Boer War from which he had not been expected to make a full recovery.

Then aged 35 and with a wife and five children, he enlisted again at the outbreak of the First World War.

William was born in New York, Lincolnshire, before moving to Australia with his family, aged 12. He went on to have five children with his wife Helen.

Their children were named William Arthur, Clifford, Keith, Charles, and Alice.

In 1919, Helen and the children were living at Fletcher Siding near Ballandean.

At 21, William served with the 1st Queensland Mounted Infantry Contingent during the Boer War. He arrived in Cape Town, South Africa in December 1899 but was invalided back to Townsville in August 1900.

A review of his medical report shows he “evidently suffered from a fracture of the base of the skull”.

In the report, a doctor wrote “with regard to prognosis, I can hardly regard this case hopefully. His eventual recovery though possible is more or less improbable. In any case it is imperative that he should lead a quiet and practically invalid life for some considerable time (probably years). I do not think that any operative measures are likely to be of the least benefit to him. At any time the supervention of inflammatory processes may prove fatal”.

William was “sent to Stanthorpe Hospital for two to three months in the hope



IN MEMORY: The wreath Peter McLady laid in memory of William Cammack at Shell Green Cemetery, Gallipoli. The inscription reads - Jesus Grant That We Meet. Laid by his loving wife and children.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

of effecting a cure”.

His time in Stanthorpe must have suited him. In January 1901, there is an encouraging note saying “letter from Sec Stanthorpe Hospital – change seems beneficial already”.

Following his release from hospital, William settled in the Stanthorpe district and selected land on the Severn River.

William and Helen were living in Oakey at the outbreak of the First World War and it appears he was a man of many talents. For the Roll of Honour, Helen wrote William was trained as a painter, sign-writer, and house decorator.

William stated on his service record that he was an engineer.

He enlisted on September 1, 1914, in Toowoomba. It is now hard to imagine why William felt compelled to enlist. Despite the life-

threatening injuries he suffered during the Boer War, and his wife and five children depending upon him, he once again signed up to serve his country.

According to Norman Harvey’s book *From Anzac to the Hindenburg Line*. The History of the 9th Battalion, AIF, William joined the 9th Battalion AIF which was “Queensland’s first contribution of infantry to the Great War”.

On November 1, the SS Omrah sailed off to the war in Europe, together with the 35 other troopships and three escorting warships that formed the Australian and New Zealand First Contingent,

Harvey’s book explains that on November 28, some very unwelcome news was passed around. “The battalion was to disembark at Port Said, instead of going on to England, as had

been expected.

“Nothing was known of any fighting or proposed fighting in Egypt, and many of the men in their disappointment expressed their indignation in very ardent language – much of it peculiarly Australian. But as events turned out, the change of plan was to mean to the AIF and to Australian and New Zealand – all that is associated with the name ‘Anzac’.”

The SS Omrah docked in Alexandria, Egypt on 6 December 1914. The 9th Battalion disembarked and then set out for the Mena Camp near Cairo.

On February 27, 1915, the 3rd Brigade AIF (consisting 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th Battalions) was ordered to move from Egypt to Lemnos, an island about 50 kilometres from the Gallipoli Peninsula. William left Alexandria aboard the

WHO WAS HE?

Name: William Cammack
Rank: Private
Service Number: 733
Unit: 9th Battalion
Date of death: May 20, 1915

Cemetery or Memorial: Shell Green Cemetery, Gallipoli
In June 1922, William’s medals were sent to Helen, who had since moved from Fletcher Siding to live at Eagle Junction in Brisbane.

advance at all costs. And so the men of the 9th Battalion began to climb the steep hills in front of them; hills that were covered with thick, thorny scrub, making it difficult to force their way through.

After fighting in the capture of McCay’s Hill and Plugge’s Plateau, the 9th Battalion, now mixed up with the other battalions of the 3rd Brigade, continued their advance. They took 400 Plateau and moved the front line to the ridges along Johnston’s Jolly, Owen’s Gully, Lone Pine, and south to Bolton’s Ridge. A number of men of the 9th Battalion made their way as far forward as Gun Ridge, where they had a view of the Dardanelles Strait on the other side of the peninsula, before being forced to withdraw.

“By about 1pm, the tide of the battle definitely turned in favour of the enemy, and by 2 o’clock the Australians were gradually falling back to what was to become their permanent line until the August offensive,” Harvey said.

At a roll call of the 9th Battalion on April 30, there remained 10 officers and 419 other ranks out of a battalion of some 1000 men who landed at Gallipoli.

From the beginning of May until the 9th Battalion withdrew in November, the Battalion spent most of its time in the trenches at the front line at Bolton’s Ridge or in the reserve trenches cut into the rear of the hillside.

“On May 19, 1915, the Turks launched a great attack along the whole of the Anzac front with the object of throwing the invaders into the sea,” says Harvey. “In this attack, the 9th Battalion suffered 16 men killed and another 25 wounded. The Turkish casualties were very high, with over 200 dead Turkish soldiers counted in front of the 9th Battalion lines.”

According to the War Diary of the 9th Battalion, on May 20, 1915, at 7pm the enemy advanced under the cover of a white flag and stretcher parties and then attacked. The attack lasted until 8pm. The 3rd Brigade trenches were heavily shelled during this attack.

Private William Cammack was killed in action on May 20, 1915. Although William’s service record states he was killed at Gaba Tepe, the 9th Battalion was in the frontline north of Gaba Tepe, at Bolton’s Ridge.