

New details on Stanthorpe WWI soldier come to light

Article leads to new info about William Sharpe

By PETER MCLADY

A NEW, fuller picture of William Sharpe has emerged since the publication of his story in the Border Post in August.

This picture is richer in detail but is more complex, not only because of the new information discovered, but also because of important details of his life that we still do not know for certain.

Matthew Byrnes, of Brisbane, has contributed significant detail to the broader picture of William Sharpe. Matthew is the grandson of David Byrnes who lived at "Roseburn" on the Stanthorpe to Texas road, near to "Glenlyon Station." Matthew has explained that David and William were good friends and corresponded during the war. According to Matthew, the Sharpe family lived at "Glenlyon Station" where William's father David was an overseer and a renowned stockman in the area.

Matthew discovered a photograph of William published in 1919 in



William Sharpe

Fighting is very fierce. Only 20 feet away from the Turks trenches. Don't dare look over the top or your dead.

"Australia's Fighting Sons of the Empire. Portraits and Biographies of Australians in the Great War". The following biography accompanied the photograph.

"Private William Sharpe (795), a son of David and Emily Sharpe, of Glenlyon Station, Stanthorpe, QLD., was born at Pikedale and educated at Warwick. He enlisted at Stanthorpe in December, 1914, and went into camp just before Christmas. He was only in camp a short time, and sailed for Egypt on 8th February, 1915. He was some time in Egypt, and on going to Gallipoli was

mortally wounded during his first battle on 7th August, 1915, and died of his wounds in the Malta Hospital on 13th August, 1915."

This is consistent with William's service record but as is so often the case, service records are not complete and can never give us an entire picture of the soldier's life.

Matthew has a postcard sent to his grandfather by William that sheds a much different light on this story. The postcard questions the statement that William was mortally wounded in his first battle at Gallipoli as it appears he fought at Gallipoli prior to August.

William was in camp at Heliopolis, near to Cairo, when he wrote the postcard to his close friend. It reads:

"Dear Dave. Just to let you see that I still turn my thoughts in your direction. Have saw some funny sights. Never will forget this ever (?) should I live to get back. Fighting is very fierce. Only 20 feet away from the Turks trenches. Don't dare look over the top or your dead. Was to go back today but not going till next lot. Only a (few) of us left out of the boatload that came across."

The postmark on the card is July 10, 1915 and it is clear that William is writing that he has already been in the fighting at Gallipoli by this date. The postmark appears to be accurate as when William wrote "was to go back today" this corresponds with 9 July which was the day when many of the 3rd Reinforcements of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment left Egypt for the Dardanelles. It is frustrating that there are no details of William fighting at Gallipoli prior to August in his service record.

However, information can be pieced together that suggests a way in which William may have been to Gallipoli prior to August. William left Brisbane aboard HMAT Itria on 9 February 1915 as part of the 3rd Reinforcements of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment. Also onboard were the soldiers of the 2nd Reinforcements. It is not clear when HMAT Itria arrived in Egypt but two



Stanthorpe WWI soldier William Sharpe enlisted in December 1914 and died from wounds in 1915 sustained at Gallipoli.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED



A postcard William Sharpe sent a relative while serving overseas.

members of the 2nd Reinforcements left Egypt for Gallipoli with the 2nd Light Horse on 9 May. Lieutenant Eric Boyd was severely wounded in action on 13 May at Gallipoli and Trooper Ernest Butler was wounded in action on 14 May and subsequently died on 16 May. Therefore, William was in Egypt in time to join the main force of 2nd Light Horse when they departed for Gallipoli in May.

When William wrote "only a (few) of us left out of the boatload that came across" it is unlikely that the boat he was referring to was HMAT Itria. By July 10, Trooper Ernest Butler was the only soldier to have died in action from the 2nd or 3rd Reinforcements. This is not

the case of the men aboard SS Devanna that transported the 2nd Light Horse from Alexandria to Gallipoli on 9 May.

The 2nd Light Horse landed at Anzac Cove on the morning of May 12. They moved into position at the front line at Quinns' Post and on the night of May 14 "C" Squadron attacked the enemy's position. Lieutenant-Colonel Bourne wrote in his book "The History of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment Australian Imperial Force August 1914 - April 1919".

"Our assaulting parties had hardly mounted the parapet when they were met by showers of bombs and a tremendous volume of rifle fire... of the 60 men who made this sortie 25

were killed and 21 wounded."

It is more likely that William wrote about the men he may have been aboard with on SS Devanna.

The lack of accurate records regarding William's time at Gallipoli means it remains a mystery as to how he made his way there and then back to Egypt.

It is possible that William left Alexandria on 9 May to join the fighting at Gallipoli. He may then have been slightly wounded or fallen ill and was shipped back to Egypt from where he left again in August.

It is for certain that he arrived in Malta on 12 August suffering severe gun shot wounds and that he died the following day.