

Father and his four sons go off to battle

One son pays the ultimate sacrifice

■ Peter McLady

THE Eedy family made a selfless contribution to Australia during World War I.

William, the father, together with four of his sons, George, Peter, Neil and Ronald, enlisted and served overseas.

Only one failed to return to Australia: Gunner Ronald Eedy, who died in the Battle of Passchendaele in October 1917. Although he was from Sydney, his mother Nellie lived at Ballandean, and so Ronald is remembered with honour on the Stanthorpe War Memorial.

Ronald worked as a chemist assistant and enlisted as soon as he turned 18.

Ronald's service record includes a postcard from his father, dated March 3, 1915 saying:

"My dear son Ronald. I have not received your letter as mentioned in yours to your Mother, but I can gather from hers that you want (is) my consent for you to volunteer to serve your Country. Well my dear boy, I can understand your feeling that you would like to join your brothers who are already in Egypt on active service.

"Now to business my dear Ronald, you have my full consent knowing that you would be a credit to any company of soldiers and your past experience as an officer in the Compulsory would stand you in good stead and fit you for the trials and hardships that you would have to face after at the front. Let me know the result of your application at once heard. If there is a Form of Consent, obtain one and send on to me. Love from Dad."

Ronald joined the 17th Battalion A.I.F. and went into training at the Liverpool Camp near Sydney. Ronald departed Sydney on active service aboard HMAT Themistocles on May 12, 1915. After one month's sailing, with a stopover in Colombo, the 17th Battalion disembarked at Port Suez, Egypt, and moved by train to the Aerodrome Camp near Cairo.

Following a period of intensive training, the 17th Battalion sailed for the Gallipoli peninsula on August 16 aboard SS Alaunia. The battalion landed at Anzac Cove on the morning of August 20. The next day the battalion supported an unsuccessful

Anzac attack on Hill 60 before joining a 4th Brigade-led attack on the afternoon of August 27. The summit of Hill 60 was captured but of the 100 men from the 17th Battalion who joined the attack, four were killed and 25 were wounded.

In October 1915, Ronald transferred to the 7th Battery of the 3rd Australian Field Artillery Brigade (3rd A.F.A.) so that he could join his older brother Gunner Peter Eedy. They served at Gallipoli until they joined the evacuation of Australian forces, arriving in Alexandria, Egypt, on December 26, 1915. Ronald trained in Egypt until leaving to join the fighting on the Western Front, arriving in Marseilles on March 29, 1916. From Marseilles the brigade travelled by train to

2nd Convalescent Depot, suffering from appendicitis. He rejoined his brigade on March 17. In June the 3rd A.F.A. was at Ploegsteert, Belgium, and was heavily involved in the Battle of Messines. On June 7, the brigade fired over 10,000 rounds of shrapnel and high explosive shells firstly against the enemy front line and then as a covering barrage and S.O.S. support for the advancing Anzac infantry. The artillery barrage continued unabated for two days. The War Diary of the 3rd A.F.A. noted that on October 19, it commenced moving into the line in the Battle of Passchendaele. Owing to the poor state of the roads and heavy enemy shelling, the batteries experienced considerable difficulty in moving into position. On October 22, Gunner Ronald Eedy was one of five men from the 7th Battery of the 3rd Australian Field Artillery Brigade killed in action; another four men were wounded.

It appears that Gunner Ronald Eedy was killed in a shell explosion. He was buried with his mates from the 7th battery. Ronald, who was 20 years and six months old, was later re-interred in Perth Cemetery (China Wall), Zillebeke, 2km southeast of Ypres.

In November 1922, the Army decided that Ronald's Memorial Plaque and Victory Medal should be issued to his mother, Nellie.

This decision followed a letter that Nellie wrote to the Army Base Records while living in South Kensington, Sydney, on 16 November 1922 saying:

I beg to state that my husband William Ferrier Eedy and the father of the late soldier deserted me in 1915 and is now I am told in the New Hebrides Islands. I received the gratuity payable in respect of both my husband and son, and request that the Memorial Plaque and Victory Medal for my late son be issued to me.

Private William Ferrier Eedy, Ronald's father, enlisted in Warwick on October 14, 1915. William was 49 years old and joined the 2nd Remount Unit. Remount Units had a maximum age of enlistment of 50 years and were responsible for training horses for the Australian Light Horse. William served in Egypt before returning to Australia and being demobilised in Brisbane in December 1916.



“... you have my full consent knowing that you would be a credit to any company of soldiers...”

— Private William Ferrier Eedy

northern France, settling into Borre on April 15.

In May the 3rd A.F.A. went into position at Fleurbaix and joined the attack on the strongly-held German trench and artillery positions. It held that position until mid-July when it moved to La Boisselle, on the Somme, to support the Anzac infantry attack in the Battle of Pozieres. The brigade relentlessly fired high explosive and shrapnel shells in the battle until it was relieved on August 23. The 3rd A.F.A. then moved to frontline in the southeast of the Ypres Salient. For the remainder of 1916, the brigade was stationed at Flers and Delville Wood on the Somme.

Ronald spent from February 10 until March 10, 1917, firstly in the 6th General Hospital and then



OFF TO WAR: Group portrait of Gunner Ronald Eedy, Private William Eedy (father), and Lance Corporal George Eedy. PHOTO: AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL



Perth Cemetery (China Wall), Belgium. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED