

Gus Glenroy Crouch



11th August 1894 – 26th May 1918

By Angus Crouch

Pte. GUS GLENROY CROUCH

1894-26th May 1918

43rd Battalion Australian Imperial Force

World War One, also known as The Great War, started in 1914 when Archduke of Austria Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne was killed whilst on tour in Bosnia. The Archduke was killed by a Serbian national. He was believed to be killed as both Serbia and Austria-Hungary claimed Bosnia was part of their country. An outraged Austria invaded Serbia and the Russian armed forces came to the aid of the Serbs. German forces supported the Austrian movement but were worried that there would be an attack from the west, as the English had declared themselves an ally of the Serbs.

However, the Belgians and the French armed forces had other plans. Their fight against the German campaign for domination woke the British up and the British armed forces declared war on Germany. The German surge towards Paris was halted by British, French, Belgian and other British Empire forces. These combined forces were called the Allies. The German surge halted by Allies started a series of battles in the Western Front.

Those battles were pivotal campaigns of the war. The Western Front included battles in such places as Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, Verdun, The Somme and the First and Second Battles of Ypres. If the Allies have given in or retreated at any point, the Germans would have been able to push forward towards Paris unless the Allies could attack them again.

The soldier I have chosen and researched took the call of the Australian Imperial Force and headed abroad on the ship HMAS A19 Afric. He served in the Western Front from 1916 until he was killed in action in 1918. He risked his life for the good of the Empire and showed true courage and solidarity whilst in the fields of Flanders. The 43rd battalion was an infantry battalion, these infantry battalions were needed to help out the Allied forces already on the Western Front. My soldier, Gus Crouch was part of the 43rd infantry battalion that fought along the Western Front.

Gus Glenroy Crouch was born on the 11th of August 1894 and grew up at *Billabong*, the family farm at Merriton (40 kilometres south of Port Pirie). He was the ninth child of Henry and Louisa Crouch (who ended up having 11 children) and was born at home, which was common back in the late 19th century. Because of the small farm house the boys slept in the barn, with the older boys sleeping up one end and the younger boys sleeping at the other. Every Wednesday the family would travel by horse and cart to Crystal Brook (15 km north of Merriton) to go to the markets. The family were heavily involved with the annual Crystal Brook Show each August. The Crouch boys were known to be good show horse jumpers and went in many competitions for it. Gus was educated through the public system at Merriton Town School. He was a keen footballer and cricketer playing both sports for the Merriton 'A' Grade sides. In football Gus was a small forward who was quick and nimble, as he stood at the height of 5ft 8". In the 1912 North Western Football Association 'A' Grade Grand Final Gus booted two goals in a five goal win for Merriton, over Lower Broughton. In cricket Gus batted down the order either batting at 9th or 10th. Gus was a part-time bowler spending most of the

time in the outfield. The labour on the farm was intense, the hours worked were long, so to be able to work on the farm you had to be able to endure the heat and the sun. By coming from a farm, Gus had an outstanding work ethic (compared to a kid who had only worked in corner stores in the city). The equipment used on the farm was either hand pulled or horse drawn. The boys used to cart the harvested grain from the paddocks to the wheat stacks in Merriton by a wagon drawn by eight horses. Gus was brought up a Methodist and attended church regularly at the Merriton Methodist Church.

Gus signed up for the Australian Imperial Force in 1916 at the age of 21. He enlisted in Adelaide on the 25th of January in 1916 and left from the Port Adelaide harbour aboard HMAT A19 *Afric* for France. The medical records from before they embarked suggest Gus was 173 cm tall with brown hair and grey eyes. Gus was part of the 43rd Battalion B Company (part of the Hindmarsh Regiment). Gus and his battalion were sent to Flanders and fought in the battle of Messines and the Third Battle of Ypres.

The 43rd Battalion was the battalion Gus served in and they served in the Battle of Messines and the Third Battle of Ypres. For most of 1917 they were in boggy trenches in the Somme and in Flanders in late 1917 and early 1918.

Documents show Gus was admitted to the ship's hospital during the trip to Europe. This was the first of many misfortunes Gus had whilst abroad enduring the hardships of the Great War.

Cases of sickness along the Western Front was quite common, as the trenches were muddy and full of rats, lice and other nasty creatures. Many soldiers caught Trench Fever during their service on the Western Front. Symptoms of Trench Fever were headaches, inflamed eyes and rashes on the skin. Mumps were also common in the fields of battle with Gus picking up mumps in the November of 1916. He was put into isolation or a Segregation Camp as they were known. He returned to the field in early February 1917. After about sixteen days back in the field Gus sustained a severe gunshot wound to the left thigh. This was rotten luck as he had just recovered from the mumps. He embarked to England for treatment. He spent three months recovering from the wound. After he had recovered he received leave for a fortnight. The next evening he turned up to the Command Depot in Weymouth on the southern English coast. For turning up a day late Gus was docked of two days' pay. The pay for two days was ten shillings the equivalent to around one hundred and forty Australian dollars. He stayed in England for another three months before heading out of Southampton to Rouelles in France. He re-joined his Battalion a fortnight later. Gus must have had the luck of the Irish, as after about a month he was admitted to the field hospital, sick, again! This time the cause of the sickness was the wound in his thigh. Gus was then sent to the Casualty Clearing Station before heading on the hospital train to Wimereux.

Gus spent most of his service in hospitals and camps away from the fields of battle. To me this shows courage to come back from these setbacks just to help the Empire. The ANZAC Spirit can be shown in many different ways such as mateship, courage and solidarity. Gus showed all of these during the Great War as these traits kept him alive.

The ANZACs placed their mates and people around them before themselves. Gus showed the ANZAC Spirit by his courage and willingness to get through physically demanding times when sick and injured. Gus could have been sent back home to safety and his family, but he stayed and was sent

back out into battle in the fields of Flanders. To show this much resilience against wounds that could cause painful and infectious diseases you would have needed to be very tough mentally and physically. By staying in Europe for treatment, Gus could easily been sent out to the battlefields of France and Belgium and help the Allies' cause.

The ANZAC Spirit is still shown to day even though the name of the ANZACs is no more. Australians in Afghanistan, Iraq and on peacekeeping roles in war torn countries still show these traits, commonly linked to the ANZACs of the Great War.

To sum up Gus Crouch, he was a country boy who risked his lives for others around him and showed courage when down and fate gave him the benefit of the doubt until 1918. In 1918 Gus had returned to the field from an illness to be killed in action. The official cause of Gus' death is unknown, but the family story says that in 1918, Gus was guarding an Allied ammunition base when bombed by German planes. Gus was said to be a casualty of this German raid but no documents state this or any other story of how he was killed. Gus was buried in the Adelaide Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux. His service just like many other Australian and New Zealand servicemen and women saved many lives of civilians and help keep France a free country. Thanks to Gus and other servicemen the German Empire was no more. Gus helped fight for our freedom. This freedom is what makes us who we are today. ✓

Sources

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Adelaide Cemetery

Villers-Bretonneux

