

# The ANZACs: Extraordinary In An Ordinary Way

*An essay by Nathan Churches*

During World War I, at one of the bloodiest theatres of war in the history of mankind, one nation displayed legendary courage, determination, resourcefulness and optimism even in the face of death. On the Western Front between the years of 1916-1918, thousands of Australian servicemen gave up their lives in order to defend the countries to which they swore an oath. These men demonstrated extraordinary willpower at a time when most would have been stricken with fear and this is the essence of the ANZAC spirit for which the Diggers were most known. One such Digger was the ordinary Andrew Robertson Beattie.

Andrew Beattie was born in Ballarat, Victoria in 1895 and moved to Adelaide, SA before enlisting with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF)<sup>1</sup>. Beattie was an everyday, unremarkable labourer with no outstanding trade skills. When war broke out in Europe, Beattie rose to the call of duty and enlisted for the AIF in June of 1915. After training for several months, Beattie was shipped out to Egypt where he trained for 2 months<sup>2</sup>. On the crossing to Egypt, a brief stop was made at the small Greek port of Mudros. At Mudros, Beattie joined the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion from the 4<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements. Beattie arrived in Egypt a number of days after. During this time, Beattie went absent without leave for 3 days, and was consequently placed in detention for 72 hours, and was forced to forfeit 3 days' pay. While this was a blight on Beattie's otherwise honourable record, it exhibits the notion that he was not afraid to enjoy himself even while at war. This larrikin attitude was evident in many young Australian servicemen and helped define the ANZAC spirit in the way that they were capable of remaining optimistic and engaging in social activities, even at the bleakest of times.

**Casualty Form - Active Service.** Army Form B. 103.

Regiment or Corps 27th Battalion, 7th Inf. Brigade, A.I.F. 2254

No. 2254 Rank Private Name BEATTIE, A.R.

Terms of Service (after 6 months) Service stations from 01. 22/6/15.

Date of appointment to first rank 22/6/15

Qualification (D)

Date	Particulars	Place	How	Remarks
22/6/15	JOINED 27th BATTALION FROM 4th REINFORCEMENTS.	Mudros	22/6/15	D.O. 4/270.
	DISMISSED BY MUDROS	Alexandria	10/1/16	D.O. 2464.
	Absent without leave from 20/1/16 to 23/1/16. Forfeits 3 days pay. Awarded 72 hours detention.	Tel-el-Fehri	21/1/16	AF5971. D.O. 17/1000.
	PROCEEDED TO JOIN A.I.F. DISMISSED BY ALEXANDRIA	Alexandria	19/2/16	
	WOUNDED IN ACTION.	France	4/6/16	AC.2001. F.O. 28/2200. 1156/28/16.
	Shell Shock. Admitted & transf'd. to Rest Stn.	"	6/6/16	AX261/16.
	Shell Shock. Admitted & discharged to duty.	"	6/8/16	AX261/16.

By whom reported

Beattie's Casualty Form

After completing the training in Egypt, Beattie and the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion proceeded to Marseilles, France and entered the front line trenches for the first time on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, 1916<sup>3</sup>. Life in the trenches was unpleasant beyond belief, with soldiers having to live in unthinkable conditions. Disease and death were widespread, and vermin such as rats were rampant. It is a miracle that the soldiers were capable of living, let alone fighting a war,

<sup>1</sup> (Attestation Paper, 1915)

<sup>2</sup> (Casualty Form - Active Service, 1915, 1916)

<sup>3</sup> (27th Battalion)

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under these circumstances. Food rations were meagre and soldiers were generally allotted a few hard biscuits and cold stew or soup every day. Supplies became increasingly difficult to deliver, and cooks turned to using local weeds as ingredients for soups<sup>4</sup>. Beattie lived in the trenches for a period of almost 3 months before participating in a major battle.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division, of which the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion was part, participated in the Battle of Pozières from July 28 to August 5, assisting other Australian troops in resisting German attacks on the small village of Pozières in the Somme Valley of France. Originally captured by the 1<sup>st</sup> Division five days prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's entry into the battle, Pozières was a heavily valued location and the German forces bombarded it with almost continuous artillery fire and counter-attacks in an attempt to win it back<sup>5</sup>. The Australian troops fought valiantly, and succeeded in suppressing the German fire and holding the village of Pozières, despite suffering heavy casualties. However on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, two days prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division being relieved by the 4<sup>th</sup>, Beattie sustained non-lethal wounds and was admitted to a rest station.



Map depicting the Western Front, with the village of Pozières highlighted in red<sup>6</sup>.

After being diagnosed with shell shock (today known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) on August 6, Beattie remained at the rest station for four days, and was discharged to duty on August 10. Beattie returned to his Battalion on August 12 and on August 22, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> at Mouquet Farm, near Pozières. The Australian attack to seize Mouquet Farm from the Germans was hampered by heavy German artillery fire on the Australian trench system, rendering communication extremely difficult. Due to this failed communication, many Australian troops were killed by their own barrages. The Australians were further disadvantaged by the fact that the Germans had a highly sophisticated and effective trench system; the Fabeck Graben.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, of which Beattie was part, was tasked with improving the trench system to a point where communication was possible, but due to the ongoing German artillery fire, even a well-executed trench system seldom lasted for more than one day<sup>7</sup>. On August 28,

<sup>4</sup> (Trench Food)

<sup>5</sup> (Battle of Pozieres)

<sup>6</sup> (AIF on the Western Front)

<sup>7</sup> (Battle of Mouquet Farm)

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the day that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was to be relieved by the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, Beattie regrettably suffered a gunshot wound to the abdomen and was admitted and transferred to the Casualty Clearing Station. The following day, Beattie was transferred to a hospital and, on the same day, died of the wound he received at the Battle of Mouquet Farm. Beattie was buried in the Warloy-Baillon Communal Cemetery Extension in France.

For me, personally, the ANZAC spirit means several things. Firstly, it signifies bravery, persistence and vigour, even in the face of adversity. This was exhibited by the thousands of young servicemen who willingly put their lives on the line to create a safe future for generations ahead. Secondly, it means being capable of enjoying oneself amongst one's companions, no matter the circumstances. Beattie exhibited this component of the ANZAC spirit when he was undergoing training in Egypt by going absent without leave in order to enjoy himself. This "mateship" is still a major component of Australian life in today's society. Finally, it means putting others before oneself in any situation, whether it be giving way to another vehicle when on the road, or carrying a wounded soldier across a battlefield to safety. At the time of World War I, Australia was one of the youngest nations across the globe and the outstanding actions of the ANZACs were one of the first defining characteristics of nation building.

One component of modern society where the legacy of the ANZACs is particularly evident is within national Australian sporting teams. Off the playing field, members of these teams will often display larrikinism, humour and a seemingly casual attitude to their lives, but on the field, one would struggle to find a more concentrated and determined effort. While there are no lives at stake in competitive sport, the attitude of Australian athletes still mirrors that of the ANZACs in World War I – a group of people bonded together to achieve a common goal, while still maintaining friendships and enjoying themselves.

Andrew Beattie was one of the thousands of young Australian servicemen who exhibited the ANZAC spirit on the Western Front in World War I. The majority of these men enlisted for the AIF of their own volition, believing that the war would be an adventure, and that they were needed to aid their country. This patriotic sense of duty is something that is less commonplace in Australia today. From his records, we can see that he was unafraid of breaking the rules yet still displayed courage when the time called for it. Beattie played a part in two major battles, both of which resulted in glorious victories and which ultimately assisted in winning World War I.

Perhaps the most impressive feat of Beattie's service at the Western Front was the fact that, a mere six days after being wounded and four days after being diagnosed with shell shock, Beattie valiantly returned to the torturous trenches and fought in another major battle in under a fortnight. At the eve of his service at the Battle of Mouquet, he paid the ultimate sacrifice for his nation. However, Beattie's efforts were not in vain; him and the thousands of other ANZACs who were killed in World War I all contributed to the Allies' eventual victory over the control powers.

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As we near the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dawn of World War I, it is important to remember the actions of the ANZACs; the countless men such as Andrew Beattie who gave their lives serving their country, and their contribution to the ANZAC spirit which still lives on to this very day, albeit in differing ways; for instance, modern Australians are more inclined to passionately back Australia in an international sporting event than to willingly put their lives at risk in an overseas conflict. Nevertheless, the legacy of the ANZACs lives on to this day, in servicemen and women of the Australian Defence Force, in athletes that represent Australia at a national level and in each and every Australian citizen whose peaceful and comfortable life was founded by the exploits of the ANZACs in years past.

## Bibliography

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