

Alexander Gerald (Gerry) Pollitt



12 Battalion



10 Battalion

Gerry was born on the 28th March 1894 in Port Pirie. For unknown reasons he became an orphan, and went to live at the Port Pirie Children's Home. At age 10 he began his working life at the local smelters where he got a job as the mail boy. By age 14 he had moved from Pirie to Adelaide, delivering ice to people's homes along with his dog, his best mate.

By 1914 Gerry, following work and to be closer to family, had moved back to the Pirie district. On 5th August 1914 P M Joseph Cook stated that -

"...when the Empire is at war, so also is Australia."

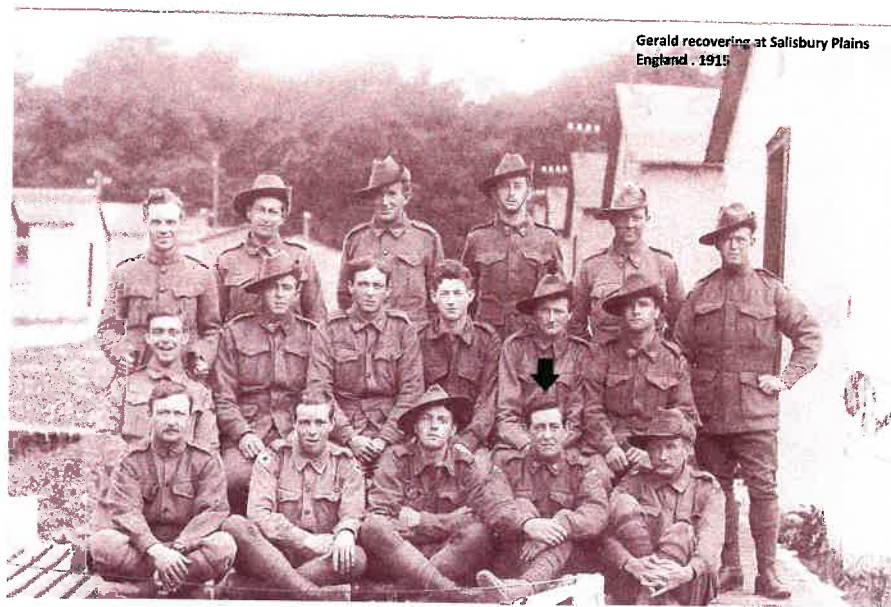
Recruiting offices opened on 10th August. Only weeks later Gerry and some of his mates enlisted. It was Wednesday 16th September, by 7th December he was allotted to the 12th Battalion 3rd Brigade, as an infantryman with the rank of private, service number 1117. He was 20 years and 6 months, height five feet and six inches with eyes and hair brown, single with no previous illnesses nor any convictions.



Not really settled into Army life, Gerry and his mates were off, on the *T.S.S. Themistocles*, which embarked Melbourne December 1914, destination Egypt. They arrived during February 1915 and went to camp Mena, where they occupied a tented camp to undertake ongoing training in preparation for hostilities. Again, they did not wait long, as the Battalion got its marching orders late February, destination Top Secret. Gerry celebrated his 21st birthday with bully beef and hard tack, as well as having to steam lice out of his clothes, whilst conducting amphibious landing drills off Is. Lemnos in preparation for the biggest beach assault to date.

Gerry's brother Hector was also in the 12th Battalion but never made it to shore. He was wounded on the boat, the bullet passed through this chest but killed the sailor behind him (Hector was discharged January 1916). On 6th May, Gerry and five mates were standing in a shell hole on Plugges Plateau talking when suddenly a shell burst overhead. His five mates were killed and Gerry was wounded in the right foot and leg by shrapnel. The shrapnel was removed. However a septic condition developed.

On 26th June, he was taken to England where he was admitted to the 2nd Western General Hospital at Manchester on 8th July. It was here that Gerry underwent an operation and treatment for sepsis, then transferred to the Military Convalescent Hospital at Woodcote Park – Epsom. At the conclusion of this treatment, Gerry was taken to the Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield, 4th August.



The Medical Board recommended Gerry be discharged as permanently unfit for service. This was approved on 8th October so on 7th November, Gerry embarked on the *Ship Runic* for return to Australia. His ankle was described as stiff but improved. He arrived at the 7th Australian General Hospital, Keswick Adelaide on 18th December and was discharged from Army service on 29th February 1916, with a pension. Gerry returned to Port Pirie, where he obtained work once again at the smelters.

While Gerry was settling back into civilian life the war was still raging and through the newspaper articles of the time he was following the debate of 'Australia and the Conscription Bill', put forward by Billy Hughes.

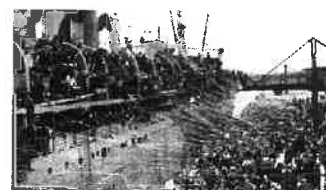
The second referendum asked Australians:

"Are you in favour of the proposal of the Commonwealth Government for reinforcing the Australian Imperial forces overseas?"

It was defeated at the polls.

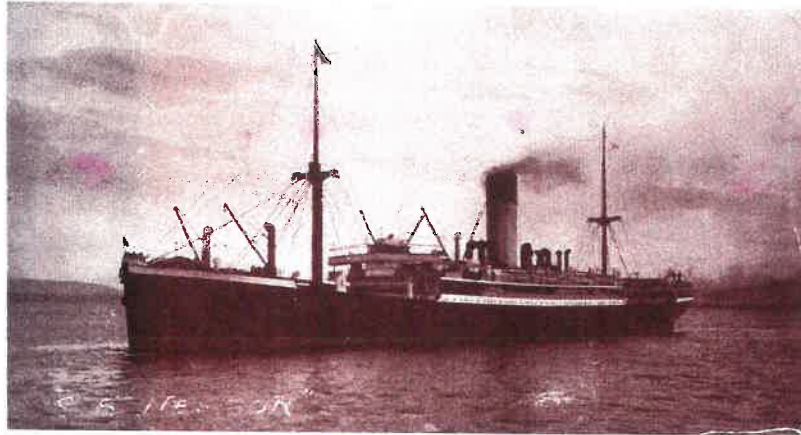
However, this debate had a profound effect on Gerry who realised that his ankle had healed as well as could be expected and that he could once again be with his mates back in Europe. So on the 6th October 1917 Alexander Gerald Pollitt enlisted for the second time at the Pirie Recruitment Centre. At the medical on the 12th, he was listed as 23 years and 6 months. He was given the service number of 7584, and was appointed to the 10th Battalion, 25th Reinforcements, as a private.

Again Gerry did not wait long to be deployed. The 25th Reinforcements embarked at Melbourne aboard *H.M.A.T. Aeneas* on 30th October 1917. Upon arrival in England the troops marched into camp Sutton Veny in Wiltshire. On 1st April 1918, the men left and proceeded to France, joining their unit on 9th April. Gerry was taken on strength the next day and straight into the thick of it. The battalion was on active operations in and around the town of Bresle. At Bailleu on 24th April Gerald was lying in a dugout resting when one of his mates jumped down to say hello, snagged his rifle and pulled the trigger. The bullet passed through Gerry's right foot (already injured at Gallipoli). Three days later, he was transferred to England, and admitted to the city of London Military Hospital, at Clapton. On 20th May, he was transferred and admitted to the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital at Dartford. After a full recovery Gerry was on light duties awaiting to return to his unit, went out to have some fun, and went AWL from 0830hrs 6th – 0830hrs 8th August. He was awarded five days loss of pay.



Gerald returned to France and rejoined 10th Battalion on 20th August. It was a good day to rejoin the Battalion because they were participating in the Brigade water sport's day. But the fun was not to last as they were in action near Cappy on the Somme between the 22nd - 26th August. Gerald and his mates had a rest and more training before their next big battle near Jeancourt. During the early hours of the 18th September hot meals were served out in total silence to the men of the Battalion. At 0520hrs they were to move from the jumping off point to start their part in the upcoming battle. Accordingly, the men showed their appreciation by moving about with more eagerness and dash than might have been expected. The 10th got away on time and from then until the objective was reached, the companies maintained formation, except for the occasional hot spots. This was the last battle for Gerald for after this the 10th was taken out from the front line and sent to the rear for rest and refitting, for them the war ended before they could be redeployed.

Gerald was given a days leave on 16th November and told to report to No 1 Com. Dep, but one day was not enough, so he went AWL again, this time from 1400hrs 16th – 2100hrs 18th November. He was awarded nine days loss of pay this time. Afterwards he was transferred to Sutton Veny, from where he embarked on the *Nestor* at Liverpool, on 13th December 1918.



The *Nestor* arrived at Melbourne on 1st February 1919, and Gerry reported at the Military Hospital in Torrens Park, Adelaide on 13th February. He was discharged from Army service on 2nd May 1919, at Adelaide. His pension was restored on 3rd May 1919. Alexander Gerald Pollitt passed away on Sunday 22nd March 1970, after leading a full life in the pastoral industry. He was 76.



"No one ever seems to admit that he enlisted out of love of country, or because that he thought his loved ones were in danger. Somehow it seems that most of us enlisted because our mates did. That men were driven to enlist by that urging spirit of pulling together that is really mateship undefined. A man enlists because his mates do, not because he wants to bayonet and bomb other men."

- Private Edward Lynch.1918

To me, Mr Pollitt has shown the true spirit of ANZAC through his actions. He joined up with his mates, only weeks after the war was declared and went on to serve in Gallipoli, having lived through his brother being wounded and then only weeks after that, five of his mates were killed right in front of him and he was wounded himself. Mr. Pollitt then spent months recovering in a hospital and was finally discharged from the Army. He had every right to sit back and relax, he had done his bit, he had watched mates die in front of him and was lucky to survive. But no, that wasn't the spirit, he went back again. This time he knew about the horrors of war and the sheer luck that was so unpredictable. His actions have shown us that the true ANZAC spirit lies within him and many others both past and present.

So on ANZAC day yes, we do remember the men storming the beaches at Gallipoli....but it is not the war that we are remembering, it is the spirit in which they trained, lived and fought together, looking out for each other. The Australians would never give up no matter how difficult the circumstances, and you will find that same spirit right through history to our present forces deployed on active duty in Afghanistan.

Bibliography

I have spoken to Mr. Pollitt's two sons Mr. Ashley Pollitt, Mr. Ross Pollitt and Mr. Ross Pollitt's wife Mrs. Gloria Pollitt. They have kindly let me copy personal photographs and given me an insight into his thinking.

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**Australian Imperial Forces Unit War Diaries 1914 – 1918
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**Australian Imperial Forces Unit War Diaries 1914 – 1918
10th Infantry Battalion April 1917 – November 1918**

<http://www.naa.gov.au/>

**Alexander Gerald Pollitt 1117 / 7584
Hector Elwyn Pollitt 547**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>

<http://mappingouranzacs.naa.gov.au/>

*"Halt! Thy tread is on hero's graves
Australian lads lie sleeping below:
Just rough wooden crosses at their heads
To let their comrades know
They'd sleep no better for marble slabs,
Nor monuments so grand
They lie content, now their day is done
In that far off land."*

– Tom Skeyhill