
PREMIER'S ANZAC SPIRIT SCHOOL PRIZE ESSAY

Captain Harold Edwin Salisbury Armitage

Harold Edwin Salisbury "Rollo" Armitage was born on the eleventh of November 1894 on Edsall Street, Norwood, South Australia. He was the eldest son of Henry and Martha Armitage and brother to George and Bessie.



Harold Edwin Salisbury Armitage in Adelaide, just before departing for the war.

Harold was educated at Houghton Public, Adelaide School of Mines and Adelaide High School. He later studied English and History at the University of Adelaide whilst following in his father's footsteps and completing a degree in education. Armitage was heavily involved with Cadets and civil service activities in his community, participating in the Adelaide High School and Senior Cadets. When the war broke out, Harold was eager to enlist, but was refused acceptance. Instead, the persistent Armitage joined an Officer Training Course and passed at the top of his class. He proceeded to Oaklands Training Camp where he helped train the 3rd, 4th and 5th reinforcements of the 10th Battalion. Armitage proved to have great leadership abilities and was accepted into the 5th reinforcements. When he departed for the war, Armitage was not married and had no children.

The Gallipoli Campaign

Winston Churchill was the mastermind of the Gallipoli Campaign. He believed that an attack on the Ottomans was the solution to the stalemate on the fronts in Northern Europe. In addition to this, Britain aimed to protect their Egyptian colony and the Suez Canal, and the Allies aimed to re-establish communications with Russia, further divide Germany's war effort and possibly attack Austro-Hungary from the South. The Allies initially attempted a naval attack in the Dardanelles in February of 1915. These attacks failed and allowed the Turks time to prepare for a land invasion.

On April 25th 1915, a series of landings took place on the western coast of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The British 29th Division accompanied by the French Oriental Expeditionary Corps landed at Cape Helles and were instructed to push north; whilst the ANZACs (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) landed in what is now called ANZAC Cove and were instructed to move east across the peninsula. On that day, through sheer determination the Allied troops made considerable advancement against a well-prepared enemy who were positioned on higher ground. The ANZACs had little choice but to 'dig in'.

A stalemate was soon reached and the line after the first day at Gallipoli remained almost the same for the entire eight month Gallipoli Campaign. The August Offenses were the final attempt for the Allies to achieve their goals. Troops landed at Sulva Bay on August 8 whilst the ANZACs fought several battles in order to distract the Ottomans from the incoming troops. The attacks at The Nek and Lone Pine were very costly – and the point[s] of Chunuk Bair and Hill 971 were both unable to be captured. More attacks were led at Hill 60 and Scimitar Hill. Armitage wrote in his diary, “We haven’t got past the first step on our way to Constantinople – and God know whether we ever make a second step.” When the Allied troops were evacuated from December 7th 1915 – January 9th 1916, 8141 Australian men had given their lives.

Captain Armitage’s Experiences in The War

Harold Armitage was accepted into the 5th Reinforcements of the 10th Battalion (nicknamed the ‘Fighting Tenth’ due to their determination in battle) as a 2nd Lieutenant on the 24th of March 1915, and sailed for Gallipoli a month later on board the ‘HMAT Hororata’. Unusually, Armitage was never assigned a Service Number. Upon arriving in Gallipoli in late May, Armitage was promoted to Lieutenant and served as a platoon commander in the trench nicknamed ‘Sulphide St.’ Records show that he remained healthy throughout his service in Gallipoli, and he was never wounded. His diary and letters home outline the details of his service in Gallipoli including patrols, digging trenches and caring for the morale of his men.



The HMAS Hororata docked in Port Melbourne

Armitage describes his role in the Battle of Lone Pine during August. The 10th Battalion was tasked with providing cover fire for the charging ANZAC troops. Armitage described how horrible it was to witness men trapped by the wire as they charged towards the second trench, whilst “the machine guns simply mowed our boys down like hay”. He was frustrated by not being able to contribute more.

Armitage was withdrawn with the remaining men from the 10th Battalion on the 21st of November 1915 and sent to Egypt where they were transferred to the new 50th Battalion (also comprised of South Australian men). On the 12th of March 1916, Armitage was promoted to Captain of C Company.

Armitage arrived with his men in Marseilles on the 12th of June 1916 where they engaged in their first major battle at Mouquet Farm on the Western Front two months later. He experienced bitter trench warfare until he led an attack at the fortified Outpost Village of Noreuil – near the Hindenburg Line. On the 3rd of April, whilst trying to assess the situation for his troops, Armitage was shot through the head and killed instantly. He is buried at the Noreuil Australian Cemetery with more than 80 members of the 50th Battalion that died that day.



AIF Soldiers at Noreuil. France in 1917.

Captain Armitage's Display of ANZAC Spirit

Captain Armitage was an ordinary soldier, but displayed the extraordinary spirit of an ANZAC. He was known for keeping his cool in battle and maintaining order in his company. He was well liked and respected by his men due to his good nature. Armitage was an excellent leader – as shown through his many leadership promotions. He was very motivated by duty and eager to serve. Most honourably, Armitage was fiercely protective of his men.

Armitage wrote on his 21st birthday that he “would of course have liked to be in South Australia and at home today – but when our nation is attacked ... I think I am absolutely in my right place,” and that he would “go into action with the calm assurance that I have done my duty for myself and my country.” Harold Armitage was killed whilst trying to look after his troops. His dedication, courage and selflessness defines him as an ANZAC.

His most prestigious award was his Mention in Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches, for leadership and gallantry in the face of the enemy in August 1916. His service is now remembered in memorials around the nation, including at the Australian War Memorial, his birth place Norwood and his home town of Millicent.



Armitage's war medals. Left to right: 1914/15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal (with MID gold leaf)

The Impact on South Australian Families and Communities

By the end of the war, over 6,600 South Australians would not be returning home. Many men left behind young families who struggled without their support. A staggering 170,000 Australian survivors had suffered severe injuries or illness and required ongoing medical care. All of those who returned had made a life-changing sacrifice.

In the case of the Armitage family, I found no record of George or Bessie marrying or having children. This family line may have now died out, leaving no family members to tell Harold's story. Armitage sensed that his family would be equally proud of his service and deeply saddened if he did not return. He wrote to them saying, “It must seem very unsatisfactory to you after having brought me up and educated me too, and then I rushed off at the very first chance, but then I know what you would have thought of me if I'd played the 'stay at home'. I know you wouldn't have thought it 'Australian'. I'm sorry I may not have the chance now to repay you.”



WWI War Memorial on Osmond Tce. Norwood – Captain Armitage's name is listed here

My Understanding of the ANZAC Spirit

The legend of the ANZAC has come to represent Australia's national character.

The ANZAC Legend speaks of the stories of bravery and of the men who gave their lives for Australia. The ANZAC Spirit, however, is the idea that the values and characteristics that are encompassed in the legend are kept alive: mateship, good humour, bravery, acceptance, service and sacrifice.



Armitage's gravestone in the Noreuil Australian Cemetery (Plot 1, Row E, Grave 5)

It is this spirit, the unique combination of all of these values that has come to define our country. These characteristics remain relevant to us today and to our national identity. This spirit is kept alive by those who believe in it and those who want to be a part of this society.

As people in modern Australian society are less and less connected to the men who created the legend, it is the ANZAC Spirit they began that must be maintained. There must be more to the meaning of ANZAC than the dictionary translation we all know, more meaning in the deaths of the thousands of Australians. The personal stories of each and every man tells us what the ANZAC spirit means –the spirit they left behind can stay forever. For the message of the ANZACs to live on, we must understand that we do not celebrate the ANZAC Legend, we celebrate the ANZAC Spirit. As Michael Joffrey, the former Governor General of Australia once said, "Although the ANZACs lost the campaign, they created a lasting identity for Australia."

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