

Premiers ANZAC Spirit School Prize

Lance Corporal Phillip de Quetteville Robin, 1884-1915

The ANZAC Spirit was born on the shores of Gallipoli in April 1915. Although there was no military victory, the ANZAC Legend is the belief that the Australians displayed great courage, endurance, initiative and mateship. Such qualities came to be seen as the "ANZAC Spirit". Although the military expedition was extremely unsuccessful and there were over 26 000 Australian casualties, it is widely believed that the nation triumphed. Furthermore, the ANZAC legend helped Australia form a national identity based on this notion of what it meant to be Australian. Hence, ANZAC Day is celebrated with such pride and sense of nationalism despite the military exercise being so unsuccessful (*Australian War Memorial, 2014*).

The Gallipoli Campaign was a significant event in Australian history, because it occurred when Australia had only just become a federated nation. Australia tried to assert its place alongside a collection of nations with thousands of years of history. In the eyes of the rest of the world, Australia had no separate celebrated military history and no distinct cultural characteristics as a nation. The diggers fought alongside the British to protect British colonial interests and Australians were very much loyal to 'The Motherland'. Gallipoli was the first opportunity to show the world its strong national character.

Philip de Quetteville Robin was born on August 19 1884. He was raised in Gilberton, South Australia, alongside three sisters, Dorothy, Ruth and Marie. (*Redlegs Museum, 2014*) Robin was educated at St Peter's College from 1897-1900 (*A. McKinnon-Matthews, 2014*). He left school early after displaying promising athleticism as an Australian Rules football player and he was soon recruited to the Norwood Redlegs Football Club. He quickly proved himself and was elevated to the first team the following year (*M Colligan, 2014*). Robin represented South Australia in national tournaments for several years and was commended by teammates, coaches and officials as someone who played the game with great bravery, sportsmanship and fairness. In 1907, he won the prestigious Magarey Medal as the best and fairest AFL player in South Australia (*Barrier Miner, 1915*).

Robin also worked as an accountant in a Bank of Adelaide branch in Murray Bridge (*South Australian State Library, 2014*). After returning from an interstate football trip in early 1914, he spoke about his readiness to surrender his own ideas of life for the nation's success and prosperity, and on the following

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day, he enlisted in the Australian Army at Morphettville Racecourse. Philip de Quetteville Robin departed Adelaide on the HMAT Ascanius on October 20th, 1914, headed for Cairo, Egypt (*National Archives, 2014*).



(M, Colligan, 2014)

After two months of training in Australia, Robin and the 10th Battalion landed in Egypt in December 1914. In January, Robin wed his childhood sweetheart, Nellie Honeywell in Egypt. The members of the 10th Battalion set aside their large cafeteria tent and on the morning of January 17th, Phillip de Quetteville Robin and Nellie Honeywell were married (*Eastern Courier Messenger, 1915*). Present was the bride's mother, stepmother and members of other regiments (*10th Battalion Australian War Memorial, 2014*). Proposing a toast to the bride and groom, Colonel S. Price Weir, said:

I do not suppose that a similar wedding has been solemnised so close to the mighty pyramids for many years; indeed, for many thousands of years, we all hope that when we have defeated our

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enemies he will return to South Australia with his wife, to peace, long life and prosperity (The Advertiser, 2014).

The love between this couple was a stark contrast to the hatred of war and truly shows the power of their love. After a short honeymoon in Cairo, Robin returned to training and his wife travelled to England to begin service as a nurse. Australian nurses were not able to serve if married however, Nellie served in England where she may have used a different name. This explains the absence of any records of her in Australian and British Archives.



Phillip de Quetteville and Nellie Robin on their wedding day, January 17,
1915
(M, Colligan, 2014)

In the early hours of April the 25th, Robin and the 10th Battalion were the first to land on the shores of ANZAC Cove. He and companion Arthur Blackwell were ordered to “go like hell” for the Third Ridge (Looking for the Evidence, 2014). A recount by his friend Private Blackburn gives chilling details:

Bullets were whizzing all around us and men were falling everywhere. I rushed across the shore to shed my pack then straight on to drive the beggars away. The way our chaps went at it was sight for the gods; we just went straight on up the side of the cliff, pushing our way through thick scrub and clambering up the steep cliff on all. (Silent Voices, 2014).

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Amongst the rapid wildfire the two men scrambled across the beaches and scaled the steep ridges. The pair advanced further inland than any other Australian or Allied troop throughout the entire Gallipoli campaign which lasted for eight months. The way these two men were so heavily outnumbered and continued to charge for Scrubby Knoll shows extreme perseverance and sacrifice.

The bravery Robin showed resembles a quote; "Courage is the discovery that you may not win, and trying when you know you can lose" (*Soultuarity, 2014*). The courage he exhibited when he knew he may never see his pregnant wife again, he may never run onto the football field again and he may never return home. He sacrificed all of this for the love and passion he had for his country. Over 60 000 Australians served in the Gallipoli campaign, and nobody came closer to the enemy than these two soldiers. Charles Bean, in his 'Preface to the Third Edition', in the section named 'Farthest inland', said:

Evidence has lately come to hand for the belief that two scouts of the 10 Battalion - Private A.S. Blackburn VC and Lance Corporal Robin reached and advanced past Scrubby Knoll, in other words, came nearer to the objective of that day than any other Allied or Australian service man (Australian Militaria, 2014).

Charles Bean was the official Australian Historian for WWI and his comments show the true honour Robin was respected with.



No. 1 Sergeant Blackburn (second second from left) with his platoon mates, probably in camp at Murgatallah, Anzac Cove, from left: John Gordon, Francis Stokes (killed in action on 27 April 1915), Gary Fisher, Eric Melham and Paul Robin (killed in action 29-30 April 1915). Private John White (killed at wounds 27 April 1915), Blackburn (Wounded in action 1 April 1915) and Malcom Finlayson (killed in action on 27 April 1915). Gary Fisher mounted this photograph near his sleeping quarters, assuming he would remember his dead mates.

Robin (back row, first on right), friend Arthur Blackburn (front, second from left) and fellow men from the 10th Battalion

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(RSL Virtual War Memorial, 2014)

Three days into the campaign, Robin was killed in action (*C Foster, 2014*). A letter by Corporal Dennis Rowden Ward of the 9th Battalion tells of the details of his death: "It turned out to be Lance Corporal Robin, of the good old 10th battalion, he had been shot through the skull, and death must have been instantaneous" (*Yeronga Memorial Park, 2014*).

On the day of his death, he had with him a "Little Book for Nellie," a diary he kept for his wife, speaking about their future together and his undying love for her (*The Chronicle Newspaper, 1915*). Robin had only been married for a matter of months and his ultimate sacrifice shows the power of the ANZAC Spirit. Robin is commemorated at the Lone Pine Cemetery in Turkey. Robin was posthumously promoted to Lance Corporal (*AIF Project, 2014*). Lance Corporal Phillip de Quetteville Robin is a true reflection of the ANZAC Spirit. From a young age, he was always respected by those around him and news of his death devastated all who were blessed to know him. Manager of the Bank of Adelaide Branch spoke of Robin:

...he died foremost in a charge, helping to make traditions for our army, and fighting for his country. A more noble death is not possible to conceive (*The Chronicle, 1915*).

During his time serving with the Norwood Football club he was cherished by all, as reflected in this article from the Advertiser June 7, 1915:

Both teams wore crepes on the left arm for the memory of P. Robin, one of the most popular men to wear a football guernsey. Robin was always a star in the game and always played cleanly. His comrades at the club, besides missing him as a great strength in the forward line, feel a sense of deep personal loss for 'Phil' who was a personable and big-hearted man. (*M. Colligan, 2014*).

The impact of WWI on Robin's family was indeed great. Seven months after he was killed, his young widow and newborn son died during childbirth in England. The family they wished to create and the lives they looked forward to were cut short in separate tragedies; Robin never knew his wife was pregnant, however less than a year after their wedding, both of them had been killed in separate turns of twisted fate (*RSL Virtual War Memorial, 2014*). This family's contribution to Australia's first major military endeavour truly demonstrates the ANZAC Spirit. Lance Corporal Phillip de Quetteville Robin was a man of boundless courage, sacrifice and respect, and he was acknowledged for his service in being awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal.

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(RSL Virtual War Memorial, 2014)

Robin will always be remembered as a man who encapsulated the ANZAC Spirit. The selfless manner in which he fought should always be admired. As we approach the centennial commemoration of the day this remarkable man began to leave his mark on history, we honour his service with the utmost of gratitude and remembrance. Lance Corporal Phillip de Quetteville Robin is an inspiration to all Australians and will remain in years to come.

Lest We Forget.

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