

Private Ellis Andrew Stones

Rod Martin

Of slight build, weighing less than ten stone and just nineteen years old, nicknamed 'Teena' perhaps because of his youthfulness and/or small stature, carriage builder Ellis Stones was something of a surprise selection for 7 Battalion on 2 September 1914. He simply did not fit the minimum requirements stipulated by the government in the early months of the conflict. When war was declared on 4 August, thousands of eager young men laid siege to the recruiting centres. Some were keen to defend king and country; some saw it as a great adventure, others as a one and only chance to see something of the world. Whatever their reasons, they provided the recruiters with a veritable cornucopia of riches from which to choose. And so they chose the physical cream. Stringent requirements were insisted upon. The successful recruit had to have good teeth and eyesight. He could not have flat feet. In addition, he had to be at least five feet six inches in height and have a chest measurement minimum of thirty-four inches. Ellis made the height requirement by the skin of his teeth (changed from an initially written five feet five inches, and a later enlistment for home service in 1917 recorded him as being five feet five and a half inches) and his chest measurement was thirty-one and a half inches to thirty-three and a half.

Why, then, was he selected when many others were not? One suspects that the three years he spent in the senior cadets, and then his service in 58 Infantry Regiment (the 'Essendon Rifles') helped his cause. After all, the man employed to raise 7 Battalion was previously the commander of 58 Regiment: Lieutenant-Colonel Harold 'Pompey' Elliott. 'Pompey' had to and did endorse Ellis's application, along with those of his very good friends, Ken Walker and Bill Elliott. Ross McMullin tells us that, together, these three men had been called 'the Three Musketeers' when in 58 Regiment and they were also stalwarts of St. Thomas's Harriers Club in Moonee Ponds. 'Pompey' obviously knew their worth, counted them as friends and wanted them to stay together.

And so it was that Ellis – described by McMullin as unassuming and absent-minded - and the other new recruits trained at the Broadmeadows camp, and then embarked on A20 HMAS *Hororata* on 19 October 1914, ostensibly bound for the conflict in Europe. Soon after, the men arrived in Egypt and transferred to a training camp at Mena, just outside Cairo. Their target was to be Gallipoli, not the Western Front as most had assumed.

7 Battalion sailed for the Dardanelles in April 1915. On the 25th of that month, 'Pompey's' men went ashore as part of the second wave, early in the morning. Ellis, Ken and Bill had the privilege (if it could be described as that) of being rowers in the first boat. It and three others headed for shore, but they drifted off course and headed for a point in the cove directly opposite the one designated for 7 Battalion.



Boats, believed to be those of 7 Battalion, approaching the shore at Gallipoli, 25 April 1915. (AWM H03546)

Despite bullets and shrapnel flying around them, the Three Musketeers and the others stuck manfully to their task as their boat approached the shore. Ken received a scalp wound, but kept going. Then Ellis was hit by a bullet that ricocheted off his oar and ploughed into his left knee. He tried to keep rowing, but the pain was too much, and another man took his place.

When they finally reached the beach, of the 140 men carried in those first four boats, only thirty-five were unscathed. The Turks maintained a withering rate of fire on the first boat as it sat on the sand, killing many more of the troops. Bill Elliott was among them. Ellis was trying desperately to staunch the blood flow from his own wound as well as those of others, a dying mate lying across him, preventing him from moving. Stretcher bearers finally arrived after about an hour, lifted Ellis out, carried him across the beach to a relatively sheltered spot, attempted to stop the bleeding from his knee, and then transported him along the shingle to the spot where the rest of the battalion had landed.



Ellis and the other wounded – including ‘Pompey’, who had been shot in the ankle, and Ken with his scalp wound – stayed on the beach for hours, being intermittently bombarded by shrapnel shells. When he finally was evacuated, Ellis was transferred from boat to boat before finally being placed on a transport and carried to Alexandria. McMullin tells us that that amputation of his leg was only narrowly averted.



7 Battalion boats landing at Gaba Tepe, 25 April 1915

(AWM P00229.001)

Ellis arrived at the First Australian General Hospital in Heliopolis, Egypt, on 30 April. He sent a cable home as soon as he could: “Wounded leg Bill gone Ellis.” The doctors at the hospital decided that he could no longer take an active part in the conflict and, after a spell in a convalescent hospital at Helouran in Cairo, he once again boarded the *Hororata* and sailed for home on 29 July. One wonders if he knew then that Ken, the third musketeer, had died on 12 July of wounds received at Steele’s Post.

The ship arrived in Melbourne on 25 August. Ellis was discharged from the AIF in March 1916, classified as permanently incapacitated. In the words of Tony Hitchin, his wound left him limping, heavy-booted, for the rest of his life. It frequently caused him pain, and he would often have to rely upon the use of a walking stick and sometimes crutches. No more would he run with the harriers.

However, it was obvious that Ellis still wanted to do his bit for the war effort. In April 1917, he enlisted for services in Australia until the end of the conflict, and was based at the postal unit, probably handling much of the mail that went to and from the Western Front. From July to October 1918, he was allotted to an unknown form of duty at Flinders Street, and was discharged from this position at his own request on 3 March 1919. The next day, however, he was enrolled as a passport guard and fulfilled this function until he was discharged in July of the following year.

Many soldiers faded into obscurity after completing their military service – but not Ellis Stones. He resumed his work as a carpenter after his discharge, moving to a rural area in New South Wales in 1923 after his health broke down (his only son died in the same

year). There he developed an appreciation of the Australian countryside and a desire to incorporate its natural forms into people's gardens. In particular, he started working with stone, building chimneys and then retaining walls.

After returning to Melbourne during the depression, Ellis was employed by the famous landscape designer Edna Walling to build a stone wall for her. He so impressed her with his work that she encouraged him to take up the occupation full-time. 'Rocky' Stones was born! With Edna's employment and encouragement, he established himself as a landscape architect, forming his own company in the 1960s and developing an international reputation.

Ellis 'Teena' 'Rocky' Stones died in 1975 at the age of seventy-nine. One of his last developments, in Rosanna, is named 'Elliston' after him.



(from Ford and Ford: *The Australian natural garden*, Hawthorn, Blooming Books, 1999)

Sources

Australian War Memorial

National Archives of Australia

Lenore Frost

Australian dictionary of biography (online)

Carlyon, Les: *Gallipoli*, Sydney, Macmillan, 2001

Cochrane, Peter: *Australians at war*, Sydney, ABC Books, 2001

Hitchin, Tony in Stones, Ellis: *The Ellis Stones garden book*, West Melbourne, Nelson, 1976

McMullin, Ross: *Pompey Elliott*, Melbourne, Scribe, 2008

Moorehead, Alan: *Gallipoli*, London, NEL Mentor, 1974

Pedersen, Peter: *The Anzacs: Gallipoli to the Western Front*, Melbourne, Penguin, 2007