

As part of the British Empire, when Britain declared war on Germany in 1914, Australia was then automatically also at war and requested by Britain to supply troops to help fight the Germans in Europe.

Young Australians freely enlisted, looking for adventure, determined to support their King.

This was an era of patriotism; a fight for King and Country.

Amongst the volunteers was a young farmer from the Adelaide Hills.

At the age of 19 years and 4 months, he enlisted at Morphettville, Adelaide on 21st September 1914. He stood only 171cms (5'7") and weighed 59kgs (130lb). At that time, thousands of other young men signed up and, from the volunteers, four brigades, (4000 men in each), were formed.

Private Luck was attached to the 4th Brigade, 16th Battalion Australian Infantry, "D" Company.

(A Battalion had 1000 men and a Company 250).

He trained at Broadmeadows outside Melbourne along with all the other volunteers; the only volunteers to fight in World War 1 .

On the 22nd of December, just three months after enlisting, he sailed from Melbourne on the HMAT, (His Majesty's Army Transport), Ceramic with 3000 others under the command of Colonel John Monash, later to become the greatest military leader Australia has ever produced).

They stopped briefly at Albany Western Australia, before heading towards England on the 26th of December via the Suez Canal to a base camp there, to prepare to fight the Germans .

Meanwhile, in England, Churchill and his War Cabinet were trying to decide whether or not to force their way through the Dardanelles using the navy and perhaps some ground forces.

The land on either side of this narrow shipping channel was Turkish. When war broke out, the Germans promised to protect Turkey as they needed Turkey to guard the shipping channel and cut off Russia which was also fighting against the Germans. Meanwhile, in Britain, the powers that be had secretly promised Turkey to Russia if they helped them capture it.

The Dardanelles is a very narrow shipping channel, but a very important one. The Turks had set mines to stop warships passing and had heavily fortified the surrounding shores, to fire on any approaching enemy vessel. Churchill did not consider the Turks much of a threat and thought that they would capitulate quickly once his navy ships entered.

Back on board the HMAT Ceramic, it was crowded and the heat stifling. Nine soldiers died on the way across and were buried at sea, many suffered pneumonia.

During the voyage they received orders to change course to Egypt, and arrived there early in February 1915.

The 16th Battalion were stationed at Heliopolis on the outskirts of Cairo. It is here that they trained beneath the Pyramids and enjoyed the sights and sounds of a strange new country. They were well paid but not well fed, living on bully beef and biscuits that would “break your teeth”.

They were allowed to visit Cairo on leave passes and quite a few managed to climb the Pyramids, although some died trying.

The Battalion commander was Colonel Pope, who trained his men hard in the very hot, sandy desert. General Monash boasted that the 4th was the best trained Brigade in the AIF.

They were still under the impression that they would be fighting in Europe.

In March 1915, the British war ships tried to force a passage through the Dardanelles but were repelled by the Turkish who had been well trained by the Germans.

It was then decided, that the Australian and New Zealand forces would have to land on the Gallipoli Peninsula and attack the Turkish forts which were guarding the narrow entrance and help the navy gain control of the main shipping channel.

The Turks, however, had plenty of time to reinforce the peninsula with machine guns, trenches and barbed wire and, they occupied the high ground.

The British also had no idea how many men they would be fighting against. Estimates ranged from 40000 to 150000. There was a distinct lack

of forward planning and a certain amount of arrogance displayed by British leaders, Churchill and Kitchener.

The troops travelled by train from Cairo to the port of Alexandria where they boarded troop ships and sailed to the Greek island of Lemnos.

On the morning of April 14th, the 4th Brigade, (made up of 13th,14th,15th & 16th Battalions), reached Mudros Harbour on Lemnos.

The harbour was crowded with ships and men preparing to land on Gallipoli Peninsula.

The Turks already had knowledge of the impending invasion.

The weather turned nasty, with cold, howling winds and pouring rain and the wait, whilst dining on bully beef and biscuits, was not enjoyable.

Each man was issued with 200-300 rounds of ammunition plus enough food for three days (bully beef & biscuits). This load was very heavy.

It was 10 days before the weather relented and, although these men had been cooped up on board the ships, their spirits were high and, like most 19/20 year olds, they were excited. Monash was astonished at how light hearted everybody was, whistling, singing and playing jokes.

In the very early morning of April 25th, the first Anzacs landed on a small beach beneath a very steep hill, heavily fortified by the Turks. In what was to become one of many ill planned moves, the British Navy landed them in the dark, at the wrong beach, with unloaded guns.

Those first to hit the beach were cut to pieces by machine gun fire. Many did not leave their landing boats and those that did, were soon shot. As one man wrote, “ we had to jump over the side of boats into water up to your armpits. Looking down at the bottom of the sea, you could see a carpet of dead men...”

Even though the 16th Battalion did not land until late that afternoon, they still came under heavy gunfire and were utterly helpless, packed into small boats, heavily weighed down by gun, ammunition and supplies.

To land on a narrow beach and face an unsighted enemy firing down on you from the cliffs above must have been frightening to say the least! But more so, when it was your first experience of war. More than 2000 men died that first day.

The Sixteenth Battalion landed with 25 Officers and 934 men.

For four days, they fought like madmen to secure some ground, but the human cost was extreme. The waters of Anzac Cove were red with blood and the beach littered with the dead and dying. Those that made it to cover had discarded their packs and many went without food or water.

Eventually, they dug in and the trenches that they made became their home and in many cases, their grave. Nowhere, were they safe from Turkish fire and in some cases, the Turkish trenches were a mere 10 metres away.

On the 2nd of May, (just one week after landing), the 16th Battalion were down to 17 Officers and 620men.

Something had to be done about strengthening the beachhead's position and, in early May, a decision was made to attack the Sari Bair Ridge near Quinn's Post and secure it at all costs.

The Ridge was heavily guarded by some 28,000 Turkish soldiers.

The 4th Brigade was holding the most forward of the Anzac positions at Quinn's Post, an area where the Australian and Turkish trenches were only yards apart and so, they were given the task. The main brunt of the fighting fell to the 16th Battalion.

At 7pm on the 2nd of May, the order was given to attack Baby 700, (the nearest high point). One man recounted in his dairy, " Up we rushed. God it was frightful. The screams of the wounded, bursting of shells, and the ear splitting crackling of rifles. In a very few minutes, the gully at the foot of the hill was filled with dead and wounded. It rained men in the gully; all around could be seen the sparks of bullets striking. Amidst this Hell of writhing, mangled men, survivors struggled up the steep slope."

Dawn revealed, along the edge of the ridge, bodies hanging in all sorts of grotesque and impossible angles.

In one night, the 16th Battalion had gone from 17 Officers and 620 men, to 9 Officers and 290 men. The attack at "The Bloody Angle", as it was to be called, was ill conceived and destined to fail, due to lack of support and the sheer exhaustion of the troops.

On the night of May 10th, they were again ordered to attack with bayonets but were cut down by machine guns.

In the morning, only 160 men of the 16th Battalion were left. As one wrote home, “how heartbreaking it is. At roll call, name after name is called; the reply a deep silence which can be felt”.

It rained all night on May 11th and 12th. The trenches were turned to mud. With no cover, the men were soon drenched, which added to the discomfort of the biting lice, the stench of dead mates with maggot infested bodies and the swarms of flies.

On May 19th, the beachhead withstood its biggest attack. The Turks committed 42000 men to drive the Anzacs into the sea. The Anzacs had only 4500 men on the beach and 12500 on the front line. Luckily, they were ready and the Turks lost nearly 10000 men.

On May 24th, a truce was held so that both sides could collect and bury their dead.

Four days later, Private FWB Luck was taken by the hospital ship “Galeka” to Heliopolis, suffering from “rheumatism”, no doubt brought on by the cold, wet conditions and extreme fatigue.

On May 30th, lying in hospital in a strange land, Private Luck turned 21.

He returned to Gallipoli on the 15th of July 1915.

Summer had come to Gallipoli, hot days and sunsets that dappled the sea with crimson and gold. And flies, millions of them, green and blue and black and all fat from the corpses they had been burrowing into. And the maggots squirming in the trench walls. And the lice that appeared to be immortal; they seemingly wouldn’t drown, or burn up when chased with glowing cigarettes, or roll over when doused with insecticides. When the men ate bully beef or treacle or a slice of fat masquerading as bacon, they also swallowed flies. If anything, they ate flies. And flies brought on a dysenteric diarrhoea. The men were almost unable to walk through sheer weakness. They had been under constant fire. One man wrote home; “If only those at home, fed on the lies as they are, could see how the men really are: weak as kittens, covered in sores, and yet undaunted in spirit as ever; but soon these English idiots will have ruined one of the finest bodies of men that ever fought”.

On 31st July, Private Luck returned to Heliopolis Army Hospital, with dysenteric diarrhoea. These hospitals had thousands of sick and injured patients but little or no comfort from the heat and flies; lack of hygiene and toilet facilities and too few doctors and nurses.

In the meantime, the British War Council was becoming frustrated with the lack of progress. They wanted Churchill to visit Gallipoli to obtain first hand information.

As many of those on the front blamed him for the thousand that died there, it was decided that he would not go. Instead, reinforcements from Britain were sent and it was decided to launch another all out attempt on the heights of the Sari Bair Range, which overlooked Anzac Cove and the Dardanelles.

The Sari Bair Range was difficult terrain with huge ravines and peaks to 1000 feet. The highest point, and the main focus of this attempt, was Hill 971. The Anzacs had been at the foot of this Range since April, unable to advance further.

The plan was to feint an attack at Lone Pine to keep the Turks occupied, whilst the main assault took place during the night. On the 6th of August, after ferocious fighting and appalling scenes of agony, blood and slaughter, the attack was successful, allowing the main attack to proceed.

Again, the hardest task, to take Hill 971, fell to the 4th Brigade. They were to be supported and protected by a landing force at Suvla Bay made up of men from the British troops led by an incompetent Lieutenant General named Stopford.

In the early hours of August 8, three Battalions of the 4th Brigade - the 14th, 15th and 16th - set out. They were stopped by the Turks 1400 metres from their objective. No support came from Stopford's troops who had landed at Suvla Bay but not made any effort to advance.

In the hills, a fierce battle ensued. The Turks counter attacked, threatening the whole left flank of the 4th Brigade. They were held off by the 16th Battalion, but more Turkish reinforcements arrived and the position became hopeless. Fortunately for the Australians, the machine gun sections of the 4th Brigade covered their retreat.

The retreat was a shambles. No arrangements had been made to evacuate the wounded from the hills. Men were lying dead or dying everywhere. Many lay in pain on the heights and died there. Those capable of walking or crawling made their way back down to the beach.

The line of dead who tried to make it to the beach unassisted was over 6 kilometres long. They had no food or water. Many were shot a second and third time within sight of the Hospital Ships. Some that made it to the beach were that thirsty, they drank sea water. Then they lay on the beach awaiting transport to the ships.

The ships were over crowded. In the four days, from August 6th to August 10th, 26000 men had been wounded and 6 - 7000 killed. The medical officers worked to exhaustion :

“ We worked until we could no longer tell what we were seeing or doing, all day and all night, picking out the cases where gangrene had set in, and where immediate and high amputation was the only hope. The operating room was a stinking, bloody shambles, limbs thrown into baskets, men dying every minute, poor shattered figures with bloody bandages and grimy faces...”

On the 13th of August, Private Luck was aboard the French hospital ship HMHS Canada with a bullet wound to his left leg. How he got there is anyone's guess!

Back in England, news had arrived of the terrible debacle at Suvla Bay. Had Stopford's troops moved on the 9th as planned, things may have been different. Stopford was relieved of his command. The British were embarrassed.

Meanwhile, the reputation of the Anzacs became legendary.

There was to be one last battle for the men of Monash's 4th Brigade on the 21st of August at a place called Hill 60, again unsuccessful.

Private Luck did not fight in this one, he was recuperating in hospital in Cairo.

On the 28th of August, he returned to Zeitoun, base camp in Epypt.

Of the 4000 men that left Australia as the 4th Brigade, only 968 were left.

On the 9th of September, Private Luck returned to his Unit via the navy ship HMAS Jonian, which sailed from Alexandria to Mudros Harbour, Lemnos.

On the 17th of October, he was promoted to Lance Corporal.

Evacuations for sickness in October numbered 600/day and winter was coming. The troops would not survive it in the open trenches. Late in October, Lord Kitchener visited Anzac to see for himself whether a fresh attack should be made or complete withdrawal contemplated. For a change, he made the right decision - evacuate.

Lance Corporal Luck was again admitted to hospital on the 31st of October, where it appears he spent the remainder of that year recuperating, eventually being transported back to Alexandria on the 30th of December, following the complete evacuation of Gallipoli.

Snow fell at Gallipoli in late November and the trenches were half filled with snow. Soaking wet, many men were frozen alive, whilst others suffered from severe frostbite.

The final troops left Gallipoli on 20th December 1915.

What a sad ending to a generation of young, innocent Australians. Those that returned home, were morose and bitter and sometimes violent, everything made worse because they couldn't explain what made them that way. "...dreams abandoned, lives without purpose, women without husbands, families without a family life, one long funeral for a generation.."

The troops regrouped in Egypt and prepared to go to England and then on to fight on the Western Front in France.

In 1916, Major General Godley put forward a proposal to reform the Anzacs into the new 4th Division. They formed in Egypt in February 1916 and were split into the 12th and 13th Infantry Brigades.

On the 29th of April, Lance Corporal Luck was promoted to Corporal.

Initially stationed on the Suez Canal, the troops moved to France in June 1916. According to historic records, they repulsed a major German attack on the Pozieres Heights in August 1916, then marched north to the outskirts of Moquet Farm. There they relieved the 2nd Division which had lost 6,848 men in 12 days of fighting.

Again, trench warfare prevailed. No one of our current generation could begin to imagine the horror these men experienced, but this extract might give us some insight.

“we lay down terror-stricken. The shelling was awful. Our leader was shot and the strain sent two other officers mad. Another took charge, and we dug a trench. We were shot at all the time. The wounded and killed had to be thrown to one side. I refused to let any sound man help a wounded man until we’d dug in. I was buried once and thrown down several times, buried with dead and dying. The ground was covered, bodies in all stages of decay and mutilation. We were shelled ceaselessly. Another went mad and disappeared. There remained nothing but a charred mass of debris and bodies pounded to nothing. We were lousy, stinking, sleepless. I have one man’s helmet as a toilet, my tunic is rotten with other men’s blood and partly spattered with a comrade’s brains.”

The Australians were now ordered to attack from Pozieres towards Moquet Farm. This went on until October, when roads became impassable due to heavy rain and the onset of autumn. The battlefield became a vast bog.

On the 21st of October 1916, Corporal Luck was promoted to Sergeant “in the field”.

In November, two attacks were launched on enemy trenches which succeeded, but the battlefield was a quagmire and the soldiers became exhausted struggling through the mud.

The campaign ended as winter set in.

Sergeant Luck returned from Brigade Headquarters in France, to base camp at Codford, England in February 1917.

On March 22, Sergeant Luck was admitted to hospital and released again on April 4th. No mention of his illness was recorded.

Records show that on 30th May 1917, Sergeant Luck was AWOL from 3.20 pm until 10pm. He was severely reprimanded and lost one day's pay. It was his 22nd birthday.

Promotion brought with it training and responsibilities. In October, he attended the 37th Army Course in Physical and Bayonet Instruction and passed as "Good" (I guess he'd had plenty of practice).

In November 1917, he was attached to the 13th Training Battalion until again being posted to France on 31st of December. He rejoined his old Unit on 4th January 1918.

One of the perils of trench warfare, was the threat of being gassed and many suffered from this debilitating poison. In late February, Sergeant Luck attended the Australian Corps Gas School which would have dealt with the use of gas masks and protection/defence against being gassed whilst fighting.

In March 1918, the Fourth Division was rushed to the Somme region to stem the German advance. There it repulsed them in hard fought battles at Heburterne and Dernacourt. In April, the 13th Infantry Brigade was involved in a counter attack at Villers-Bretonneux.

On the 23rd of April, Sergeant Luck was again promoted, this time to Company Sergeant Major.

On the 19th of June, he returned to England for some well earned leave and it was during this time, that he married Florence Irving of Carlisle. They married on the 25th of June 1918.

He returned to France on the 13th of July and attended another course, The 4th Army Infantry School Of Instruction. Whilst there, he was again admitted to hospital (illness unknown) on 21st of August, for a period of 16 days, finally rejoining his Unit on the 12th of September .

Throughout September, Australian forces helped the British secure positions from which to attack the Hindenburg Line. This was the last and strongest of the German's army defence.

On the 18th of September, a preliminary attack was launched when Lieutenant General Sir John Monash's troops reached the first part of the Hindenburg Line. At 5.20am, Monash troops, supported by huge artillery barrages attacked the heavily fortified German defences and machine gun posts. Using only 8 tanks (as well as dummy tanks to distract the Germans), they broke through German positions and took 4300 prisoners. Although there were 1000 killed or wounded, this cost was fairly slim compared to the losses of the German forces.

On the 25th of September, Company Sergeant Major (CSM) Luck was attached to the United States Army.

On the 29th of September, the line was finally broken. Australian and US troops spearheaded this battle, given the task of breaking defences in the centre. They attacked a strongly defended sector at Bellicourt with tanks, artillery, and aircraft working in concert. Advances were made, but it was a struggle between the two forces. The fighting lasted four days and resulted in heavy losses.

Eventually, the allies broke through. The last attack was on October 5th and the Hindenburg Line broken. The defence of this sector was then handed over to the Americans while the Australians were withdrawn exhausted and depleted. 27000 men had been killed or wounded since the first battle in France.

On the 12th of October, CSM Luck boarded the "Prince George" at Le Havre, France and disembarked at Southampton the following day to commence 75 days of "Special Leave". Due to further time in hospital, he was granted further extended leave awaiting a facility ship back to Australia. This time was spent with his wife and her parents in Carlisle.

On the 9th of September 1919, their first son, William Frederick, was born.

Finally, he and his family left for home on the "Luce Woermann" on the 9th of December, arriving back in Australia on the 20th of January 1920, having been away from home for five years and four months.

CSM Luck was discharged on the 4th of February 1920, being awarded the British War Medal and the 1914/5 Star (Gallipoli).

He returned to the Adelaide Hills and settled on a farm at Mt Barker Springs, where he and his wife raised five children, three boys and two girls. I'd like to say "and lived happily ever after" but that was not to be.

War broke out again in 1939 and, although all three of his sons enlisted, he also, must have felt compelled to do likewise, leaving the dairy farm to his wife and two daughters to run.

At the age of 45, he re enlisted and was attached to the 18th Garrison Battalion, special forces based in Seymour Victoria . He was soon promoted to Lieutenant.

In September 1942, he volunteered to join the AIF and was then attached to the 34th Australian Works Coy.

On the 4th of July 1943, he boarded the American ship SS "Benjamin Bonneville" and disembarked at Milne Bay in the north of Papua New Guinea where Australians were trying to stop the Japanese advance. One year earlier this had been the sight of the first major victory over the Japanese and it was won by Australian troops.

Lieutenant Luck spent one year at Milne Bay and Port Moresby, before returning to Townsville on the HMAS "Canberra" in July 1944.

After further ailments requiring attention, he no longer passed the medical, and, in December 1944 at the age of 49, his appointment was terminated. He returned home.

Eight years later, in August 1952, Lieutenant Frederick William Benjamin Luck, Anzac and veteran of two world wars, passed away.

He was 57 years old.

"In the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them".

Thank you Grandpa

