History Assignment Biography:

By Alex Dry

Albert John Norman Simpson was born on the 8th of May 1897 in Cape Jervis, South Australia. When Albert was 3 or 4 years old his dad, John James Simpson, moved away to live in Western Australia. The rest of the family, Albert, his older brother, and Mum Ethel Edith Simpson, moved to Langhorne Creek South Australia. Albert had brown hair and hazel coloured eyes and weighed 104lbs or 47kg. His height and weight may seem low but was average for the troops that signed up for WW1 in Australia. Before he left to go to war he worked as a labourer and was un-married. Being a labourer in Langhorne Creek involved working on a farm growing crops such as corn and wheat.

On January the 14th 1916 when Albert was 18 years old, he caught a bus or walked from Langhorne Creek to Strathalbyn, then caught a train to Adelaide where he filled out and signed a form saying he wanted to fight in WW1. He most likely wanted to fight in the war as he wanted to travel the world, to serve his country and to get out of Australia. On May the 25th 1916 Albert left Adelaide for France on the ship HMAT Shropshire (A9). The HMAT Shropshire was a grain carrier that was converted to an army personal transporter. The army commonly did this so they could transport their troops long distances across seas. He arrived in France during July 1916 as the trip from Adelaide to France took about 2-3 months as there was no bad weather or rough seas.

From July to August 1916 Albert trained to become a member of the Lewis Machine Gun section in his platoon, which was part of the 10th Infantry Battalion. It most likely took Albert around 2-3 months to finish his training. This role in his platoon meant he had to keep the machine guns topped up with ammunition, clean and well looked after. As Albert was a private, the lowest rank of soldier, this was probably his main role in the section, and he didn’t carry a rifle or a pistol.

On August the 27th1917 he lost 3 days of pay after getting drunk which is a crime in the Australian army as well as in multiple other armies. It was common for soldiers to get drunk while hanging out with friends at night in the trenches.

On March 18th1918 Albert contracted a common disease, influenza, and this put Albert in Hospital for 12 days. Influenza was a very common disease as the living conditions in the trenches where horrible and if a disease or cold came into the trenches everyone caught it. He then re-joined the 16th reinforcements which was made up of men from SA. On August 31st, 1918 he shot himself in the left thigh. This was a common occurrence for soldiers to do so they didn’t have to fight in the war. He then spent 2 months recovering in a hospital in Rouen, France. Finally, he recovered on the 17th of October 1918 and was given light duties till the end of the war. Light duties involved guarding bridges and important points, helping with the movement of civilians and returning soldiers as well as helping with the distribution of food and water.

After the war ended Albert was moved to the Motherland, England, where he spent 3 months on leave. This was unusual as soldiers usually only got given 3 days of leave 3-4 times a year. He finally returned to Australia on August 30th1919 and was discharged from the army a day later. Albert died on the 3rd of December 1982, aged 85 years. Albert showed true Anzac spirit by signing up to the war to serve his country.