

This extract from *"The Fighting 10th"*, Adelaide, Webb & Son, 1936 by C.B.L. Lock; kindly supplied courtesy of the 10<sup>th</sup> Bn AIF Association Committee, April 2015.

## Arthur Seaforth BLACKBURN VC

Born 25 November 1892 at Woodville, South Australia.

Son of the late Canon Thomas BLACKBURN and Mother Margaret Harriette Stewart (nee BROWNE), who was Rector of St Margaret's in Woodville for 27 years.

He resided at Woodville for 20 years and was baptized and confirmed in St Margaret's and also sang as a chorister in the same church.

He is step-brother of the well-known Sydney physician, Lieutenant-Colonel C Bickerton Blackburn OBE, BA, who served with distinction in Egypt, and resided at Pott's Point, NSW.

Prior to the Great War he had not served with any Australian Military Force unit, and was practicing as a Solicitor with an Adelaide legal firm, and was residing at Hyde Park

He was one of the first South Australians to offer his services for abroad, and enlisted as a Private in the 10th Battalion at Morphettville on 19 August 1914. His regiment No.31, he was drafted into original 'A' Company and embarked with the original Battalion per *HMAT A11 Ascanius* on 20 October 1914.

He landed with the Battalion scouts from the *Prince of Wales* at the historic landing on 25 April 1915 and distinguished himself that day by penetrating the greatest distance inland. With the late Private Phil Robin he reached his farthest point after circling the east side of Scrubby Knoll to the north of it, a direct distance of about 2,000 yards from the beach at Anzac Cove. Until 1934 it was generally conceded that Lieut N M Loutit and Private Fordham of the 10th, reached the farthest inland point, but in 1934 Dr C E W Bean intimated that Blackburn and Robin could probably claim that distinction. In reference to this incident he said:

*"All that I have done is to supply Dr Bean, at his request, with charts and descriptions of the course that Phil Robin and I took after leaping from the boats at dawn on 25 April 1915. I do not know precisely how far we or anyone else went, and a statement as to who went farthest into Gallipoli is Dr Bean's responsibility based on information which he has gathered from myself, other men, and official documents. On the morning of that 25 April, Robin who was my old tent mate, and I were in the prow of one of the early boats to land. Our instructions were in effect 'Go like hell for the Third Ridge'. We leapt ashore and scrambled through the scrub by a winding route. We believed that we passed Third Ridge. Phil Robin was killed later that day."*

Shortly after the landing he was promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal, and whilst holding this rank was detailed to take charge of the 10th Battalion post office for one month.

On 4 August 1915 he was promoted on the field at Anzac to rank of 2nd Lieutenant, and posted to 'A' Company as a Platoon Commander. He remained with the Battalion during the whole of the Defence of Anzac, and on 21 November 1915 accompanied same when it was withdrawn.

He accompanied 10th to Lemnos and Gebel Habieta, Egypt, where on 20 February 1916 he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant.

He subsequently accompanied the Battalion to France, where as a Platoon Commander in 'D' Company he distinguished himself in the attack on Pozieres on 23 July 1916.

For his conspicuous bravery he was awarded the **Victoria Cross**, which was promulgated in the London Gazette on 9 September 1916. It was actually in the heat and burden of the bomb fight in OG2 that he won the VC, and Lieutenant-Colonel S P Weir, in recommending him for the highest decoration said:

*"Matters looked anything but cheerful for Lieut Blackburn and his men, but Blackburn lost neither his heart nor his head."*

He was promoted to the rank of Temporary Captain on 1 August 1916, but through sickness was compelled to evacuate on 7 September 1916. He proceeded to England, where he was admitted to 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth, and thus reverted to his substantive rank of Lieutenant.

Late in 1916 with Captain W F J McCann, he attended an investiture at *Buckingham Palace*, where His Majesty the King of England decorated him with the VC medal. He was the 10th member of the AIF to win

this coveted distinction, and also the *first member of the 10th Battalion and the first South Australian to obtain this decoration* during the Great War.

Ill health prevented him from returning to the 10th in France, and he subsequently embarked on the hospital ship *Karoola* arriving back in Adelaide in December 1916, his services with the AIF terminating on 10 April 1917.

On 16 March 1917 he married Rose Ada, second daughter of J H Kelly of Walkerville, there being four children from this union (two sons and two daughters).

He returned to the legal profession and became a Principal in the firm of Fenn & Hardy. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace on 29 August 1918 and represented the District of Sturt in South Australian House of Assembly from 1918-1921. He was President of the Returned Soldiers' Association of SA (RSL) 1919-1920, and was also a member of the Citizens' and Business Men's Committee.

In 1925 he entered into partnership with Lieutenant-Colonel W F J McCann, who was associated with him in the Pozieres attack, and for his splendid work was awarded the MC. They practiced together as barristers and solicitors at Trustee Building, 22 Grenfell Street, Adelaide, and in this manner had carried their war-time partnership into the days of peace.

He was appointed City Coroner on 9 September 1933.

He was appointed an Honorary Lieutenant in the Reserve of Officers, Australian Military Forces on 20 February 1916 and a full Lieutenant, Reserve of Officers, 1 October 1920.

He was transferred to the 43rd Battalion with same rank on 30 October 1925 and promoted to rank of Captain on 21 February 1927.

He was transferred to the 23rd Light Horse Regiment on 1 July 1928 and the 18/23 Barossa Light Horse on 1 July 1930 and in 1935 was still serving with that unit.

He was a member of the Royal Adelaide Golf Club and the Adelaide Branch of the Royal Society of St George, and on 31 August 1935 was Chairman of the AIF Cup competition conducted at the Kooyonga Golf Links.

On 6 May 1935 he was a recipient of the late Kings' Silver Jubilee Medal, and in 1935 was residing at No. 5 Salisbury Terrace, Collinswood.