



# AROUND THE GRAVES

RESEARCH

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To commemorate Anzac Day 2014, we focus on a few soldiers of the Great War whose letters home were published in the *Moorabbin News*.

## Joe Warburton...

Joseph Warburton (Memorial Park, CofE "79" 16) was the first soldier to enlist from Cheltenham, joining on 17 Aug 1914. He wrote of the famous HMAS Sydney battle against the *Emden*.

*"Just a line to let you know how I am getting on. Up till now I am in the best of health, and having a calm trip, the only thing it has been hot for about three weeks ... Everything went well till we got near Cocos Island, and the boat we are on got a wireless message to say that a strange cruiser was in sight, so we sent it on to the Sydney, who went after it. It proved to be the Emden; everybody was excited. They fought for some time; the first shot of the Sydney took the enemy's three funnels, and the next shot killed seventy men. There were four killed and fifteen wounded on the Sydney and over 150 killed on the Emden. It was a lucky thing we didn't get blown up. The Emden was waiting for us since we left Australia, but we got on first. When we got to - we took the prisoners on our boat, and now we have two days a week to guard them - fixed bayonets and twenty rounds of ammunition. They told me they were waiting to get our ship at any costs. It was a terrible thing the ship on fire, and men's legs, arms and bodies in dozens, but the " Emden had sunk dozens of other ships, it was a terror to the sea, and had a 14,000 ton collier coaling for it, which the Sydney also sank. The Germans we have, are a well-made lot, and they seem to be happy, but the officers seem surly, but we take no risks, if they attempted to escape we would shoot at once. We are passing an African island now where the cannibals would eat you. We will get to Aden on Wednesday, Port Said next week, and England at 'Xmas, It is a long trip and over forty boats with us. We are well on our boat and having a good time. I am sending you a photo of it. Remember me to all at home."*

(Source: Moorabbin News 9 Jan 1915 p3)

## Charles Mewett...

Charles Thomas Mewett (Memorial Park, Lawn "E2" Row G Grave 2), of Mentone was another to join on 17 Aug 1914. He wrote of the Gallipoli landing.

*"I am lucky to be alive to tell my experiences. We set sail for the Dardanelles on the 24th April, and landed under a terrific fire of shrapnel from the Turks, you can guess how "hot" it was when only 11 men out of the first three boat loads of Australians landed. Well, we chased the Turks back about three miles, and all that day it was as much as we could do to hold them back, and when night came on it was worse. It was an inferno, the cries of the boys that were wounded, and those of the Turks were awful. All that night it was touch and go, until the New Zealanders and our reinforcements came up, and we were able to dig in. On Monday when it was light enough to see, I found myself mixed up with the New Zealanders. And about two miles from the fifth headquarters. Poor Joe Warburton was wounded after doing great work. On Wednesday we had a sorting out, and all the fifth [Battalion] had to report on the beach. Well out of 1,100 who landed, only 450 reported, so you see we suffered very much. Other battalions are the same."*

(Source: Moorabbin News 26 June 1915 p5)

## James Harkins...

James Matthew Harkins (Pioneer Cemetery, Pres "58" 13), was the unofficial war correspondent for the *Moorabbin News*.

*"Just a few lines to let you know we are at last in the proximity of the "front"-that is "somewhere in France." As we are still well behind the firing line there is nothing startling occurring at present, so far as I am concerned, but there probably will be before you receive this epistle. As I have not seen much of France and its customs to date I cannot dilate on the subject. There was rather a good*

story published in the "Daily Mail" the other day, in which one of our boys used his imagination a la de Rougement, the gist of which is as follows: While in hospital he had informed a few of the elderly visiting ladies that boomerangs grew on trees, and when the boomerang season came on, and they wore ripe, the natives eat them which drove the partakers of the mythical fruit non compas mentis, (French for "ratty") and caused them to commit dreadful atrocities. The elderly dames wore horrified, but not so a young damsel the tale was told to. She know a lot of trees grow in Australia, but thought hotels grew on them, which rendered the natives in the state as the French words heretofore mentioned implies. The young lady had been three years in Australia. I must say au revoir for the present, as it is getting dark. Will write again when opportunity offers, and if spared, which will perhaps be more interesting. There is every indication of a busy time ahead."

(Source: Moorabbin News 4 Nov 1916 p3)

## Lance Rippon...

Rather than join the armed forces, **Lancelot George Rippon's (Pioneer Cemetery, Meth "A" 1R)** volunteered for munition service in England. On his way, his boat was torpedoed.

"We left Port Said on 4th November [1916] at 10 a.m. An escort remained with us until Sunday night. The following Monday was a beautiful day, we were about 800 miles out and had just passed Crete Island where the 'Persia' was torpedoed about 12 months ago. We were told we were in the worst part of the danger zone and a good many people were looking for submarines. I was lying in my bunk, when there was a terrific explosion and out went the lights, I heard our gun go off and knew immediately what had happened. I left the cabin as quickly as possible only to meet with the rushing water. I got to the deck with difficulty and made for the boats, and managed to get into the last boat lowered. A large number of us lost all we had with the exception of the clothes we stood in and they were very few. As you probably know by now all the passengers were saved but it is believed that two engineers were killed, the torpedo exploding as it struck

the engine room, about 15 feet away from my cabin. The "Arabia" sank at 12 15 a.m. at this time there were twelve trawlers near us and one passenger boat. We landed at Port Said on 8th November, where we received every attention, and first class accommodation. There were 23 munition workers on board. We went to the British Consul's office who asked us whether we desired to go back to Australia or to go on to England, and of course we wanted to go on to England, and had our photo taken for new passports. None of us had any money and we wanted a few more clothes and eventually obtained an order to purchase a few until we got to England ... We subsequently reached England where a representative of Vickers instructed us where to go. Bill and I were sent to Wolseley Works at Birmingham, where we started work on the 27th November. I have got decent lodging for 25/- per week. The standard wage is 46/- for 53 hours. We got time and a quarter for over time and double time for Sundays. We have to work over time every evening from 6.30 until 8 o'clock and Saturday afternoons and Sundays, so with over time the wages are about £3 5s per week."

(Source: Moorabbin News 20 Jan 1917 p2)

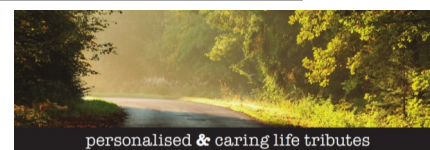
## Albert Fisher...

And finally, this letter from **Albert Fisher (Memorial Park, CofE "176" 43)** narrates an incident while serving with the Australian Light Horse in the Middle East.

"At a hospital. El Arish, a lot of pyjamas arrived, and they were needed too. While they were putting a suit on a patient (one of the many just arriving) a note fell out, and an orderly said to the patient-"Well hear [sic] you are old man, here is a note with them," and this is how it read, 'To a soldier in France, I hope none of those cold footers in Egypt get these.' This chap had one bullet through his head, one through the groin, with six other bullet wounds, and that is the message that a lady of Melbourne sent along, so you can guess what our thoughts are. She must think we are on a picnic. I would like that lady of Melbourne to have thirty seconds of what that soldier went through."

(Source: Moorabbin News 23 June 1917 p1)

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Jenny Tacken 