



Contact

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Issue 4

Yamba Museum - the Story House, River Street, Yamba NSW
Phone 02 6646 1399 - PO Box 100 Yamba NSW 2464
Email: yambamuseumnsw@gmail.com - www.pyhsmuseum.org.au

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



Hello Everyone

I can remember how anxious I was when our children travelled overseas for the first time by themselves. We were so excited but mostly relieved, when we received a postcard or a one-minute phone call from them to know that they were safe.

It is not hard then to imagine that families at home would have experienced the same fear knowing that their husbands, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters were going off to war and wondering if they would ever come back alive.

Writing was the only communication in helping to ease their pain of separation. However, mail would often take months to arrive at the camp or back home. While overseas they wrote moving letters and postcards along with diaries. These and other personal items along with family stories are the only things that now remain. Over the years many of them have been put in a drawer or photo album only to be forgotten or bought out on the odd occasion.

While war has always fascinated the public, the Anzac Centenary has highlighted this more than anytime in our history. Consequently our *Beneath Gallipoli* exhibition is giving a contemporary feel to a historical event that has helped families to reconnect with their relatives.

Over the past weeks people have shared their stories, requested information and bought in memorabilia for us to identify. Others have expressed a sense of loss, reverence and longing.

The human face of war has been missing for baby boomers like myself and subsequent generations, but at last we are giving them a voice, albeit from the grave. While it can be confronting, these stories, although belated, are now receiving the attention their memories deserve.

If you have any military medals or memorabilia that you would like to identify or seek advice on how to store them for another hundred years, bring them into the museum and we may be able to help you.

There is still time to see the exhibition, as we will be extending it to May 26.

Until Next Month Marea

Hugh Murphy, the First Casualty of WWI – shot by a hypodermic needle!

By Donna Morgan

April 25, 2015

My grandfather, Hugh Murphy (our “Pa”), was born in 1894 in Palmer’s Island on the Clarence River in NSW. He was the son of Irish born Patrick Murphy, who had immigrated to Australia about 20 years prior, and Rosanna Nolan who was born in Maitland, Australia. Hugh was their 8th child, with two more children born after him.

At the young age of 12, Hugh was the offsideer to his two brothers working the ferries around Palmer’s Island. At 13 years of age, he worked full time (7 days a week) on a local farm for about 7 months before being asked to work at



Mr Perkins bakery shop at Yamba. For four years, his daily duties included baking up to 600 loaves of bread and then spending eight hours delivering them around Yamba and lower Palmer's Island in a horse and cart.

Yearning for adventure, Hugh set off via the train, riverboat and another train to Brisbane where he spent six months labouring on a farm at Toogoolawah. He came back to the 'big smoke' in Brisbane to work as a porter on Roma Street Railway station for twelve months. It was 1912 and Hugh thought the railways might follow the striking Tramways so he set off for a new adventure. Hugh had experience cutting sugar cane while growing up on his parents' farm at Palmer's Island so he went to Bundaberg and worked one season as a Cane Cutter. He then decided to go back home and Mr Perkins gave him his old job back at the bakery. It was here that Hugh heard the news that Britain (and therefore Australia) had entered the war on 4 August 1914.

Hugh enlisted in Grafton on 19th August 1914 as soon as volunteer recruitment commenced, lying about his age so that he could embark on, what he thought would be, a great adventure. His older brother, Patrick Vincent Murphy, enlisted at Maclean on 3rd November, 1914, hot on the heels of his younger brother Hughie.

While only 20 years old, Hugh stated he was 21 years to avoid seeking parental consent, which would not have been given. Hugh gave a middle name of "Burn" when he enlisted but in fact, he did not have a middle name. When all the other men enlisting around him gave a middle name, Hugh thought he should too so he added his grandmother's maiden name. Hugh Burns was also the name of his great grandfather back in Ireland.

At the Grafton enlistment, Hugh was given the number 917, attached to the 15th Battalion and sent for training in Brisbane, Sydney and finally Melbourne where he received his inoculations. The first two rounds of inoculation for Typhoid Fever didn't take effect so he said they gave him a big (third) dose and that sent him unconscious and straight to hospital. Hugh said he was unconscious for three days. Pa used to joke that he was the first casualty of the First World War and he was shot by an Australian Doctor with a hypodermic needle!

When he was discharged from hospital, Hugh was given the number 1495 and attached to the 8th battalion, embarking for war in February 1915 with mostly volunteers from Victoria. His original 15th Battalion, which consisted of a lot of mates from his hometown along with his brother, had sailed without him two months earlier. This proved to be a potentially life changing event as the 15th battalion was decimated on 25th April, 1915.

WAR

Hugh took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915, as part of the second wave. Shortly after, Hugh and his unit were transferred from ANZAC Cove to Cape Helles after the Turkish forces had annihilated the arriving British ships (including the *River Clyde*). Many soldiers were killed as they were disembarking the ships. Hugh and his unit were sent to help the remaining British soldiers - he said there weren't many of them left.

After Cape Helles, Hugh returned to ANZAC Cove to help defend the beachhead. He was a signaller and became a company stretcher bearer at the same time as Simpson with his donkey. By a strange coincidence, it is said that Simpson's donkey was named "Murphy" on the Peninsula.

The role of stretcher bearer was only given to physically strong men and Hugh was a large and strong man. It also had a low life expectancy. Everyone knew of 'Simpson and his Donkey' as he was a sitting duck and Pa said they would ask each other "Has Simpson got his yet?" Unfortunately, Simpson was only to survive three and a half weeks as a stretcher bearer before being killed in the third attack on ANZAC Cove by the Turkish forces on 19th May 1915.

Every day, Hugh said he expected to die. He said "you had to be ready for attack any second" and they slept standing up in the trenches. The dead bodies were everywhere and every single time, he thought "Poor bugger. I'll be next".

In May 1915, Hugh was wounded for the first time – he was shot in the head, several of his teeth were shot out and his shoulder was injured. An officer came up to him and asked if he was alright. Hugh said "Well, I'm alive". The officer replied "Then get back to it". However, Hugh did

need medical attention and he was taken to the make-shift hospital. It was here that he witnessed firsthand the sinking of the ship *Triumph* from German submarine torpedoes on 25th May 1915. Hugh said this disaster cast a gloom over the Anzacs - about the hopelessness and hell that they were now in, as well as seeing their mates in peril and being powerless to help.

While this event accelerated hostility toward the enemy from our troops, a Turkish official report of the sinking of the battleship *Triumph* referenced their compassion as it stated “*Turkish artillery with shrapnel shell could have easily blown up the rescuing boats, but feelings of humanity made us withhold our fire. The rescue work was unhindered, and the submarine escaped undamaged*”.

Pa had said that the Indians who came to Gallipoli (the Gurkhas) were fearless and marvellous fighters. He said the Turks weren't so bad and even came to like them during a ceasefire, swapping cigarettes and chocolates with them by throwing across trench lines. While Hugh said the Turks weren't so bad, he recalled the Germans would shoot anyone, referencing when the Germans fired at and wounded him in Belgium, even though he wore a red cross showing he was a stretcher bearer.

One of the few stories Pa told was when he left his post during a break in the fighting to find his brother Paddy. He did find his brother and while they were talking, a shell came into the trench and killed the two men beside them. Hugh ran back to his post, more terrified of being caught than his brush with death.

Hugh fought throughout Gallipoli, including the battle of Lone Pine and Ari Burnu, until the second last day of the Allied withdrawal in December 1915 – a full 9 months of horror. Hugh said that the retreating soldiers sprinkled a trail of flour along the paths and tracks they had to follow to the beach so they would not lose their way. Hugh's memory was very good when he was telling this story decades later and he remembered this distinctly.

On 19th December 1915, Hugh was sent back to Egypt and then in March 1916, he and his battalion sailed for France and the Western Front. Pa said that France was much worse than Gallipoli, due to the protracted

fighting and the freezing cold. France recorded their coldest winter on record in 1916, up to that time. Pa said “You were up to your knees in mud”. The death toll in France was much worse than at Gallipoli. Pa fought at the Battle of Messines in June 1917 in West Flanders, Belgium. He said it was a “terrible place...with men shot standing up, bogged down in the mud in the trenches”.

Hugh continued as a stretcher bearer during fierce fighting at Amiens, Armentieres, Bullecourt, Baupaume, Fleurs, Polygon Wood, Pozieres, the Somme, and Ypres. Hugh was twice mentioned in dispatches and received the Military Medal for his actions during the Battle of Lys (Vieux Berquin) in April 1918 where he “*showed splendid courage and.....his devotion to duty was the means of saving many lives*”. Hugh continued to rescue injured soldiers, despite being wounded twice himself. Hugh would downplay his bravery and courage and only when asked about it, he would comment “I was just doing what I had to do but that day an officer happened to see it”.

Hugh’s brother Paddy ended up with Trench foot in France in 1917 and was admitted to hospital a number of times. Pa said “It was so cold that winter. I was lucky, my feet were good”. Paddy was granted “special leave” to Australia, given by the A.I.F. for troops who had left Australia in 1914 and been in service for four years – they were referred to as the “originals”. Paddy set sail on 8th October 1918 for the long awaited return home. Peace was declared while he was on his way home.

More than five years after he enlisted, Hugh sailed back to Australia on 14th January 1919, disembarking on his beloved home soil on 5th March, 1919.

On 26th March 1919, “one of the largest gatherings ever recorded at a social function at Palmer's Island assembled in the public hall” to welcome home Hugh Murphy. Attendees included visitors from all parts of the lower river, including prominent residents of Maclean, Harwood, Chatsworth, and Yamba, as well as the immediate surrounding district. “The Clarence River Advocate” newspaper included an article about the event and noted that Hugh “enlisted at the outbreak of the war and went through

the fiercest of the fighting of both the Gallipoli and France campaigns unscathed by the arms of the enemy”

Hugh was discharged in Sydney in August 1919, over five years after enlisting at Grafton. An officer told Hugh that he was the longest active serving soldier at that time. The Certificate of Discharge states that Hugh had a “GSW” (gunshot wound) which is usually accompanied by damage to blood vessels, bones, and other tissues with a high risk of infection. Hugh was offered an army pension but he told them to “stick it” as he was so disillusioned. He often said “We shouldn’t have been there”.

To be continued in the next issue of Contact.



YAMBA YEARS John McNamara

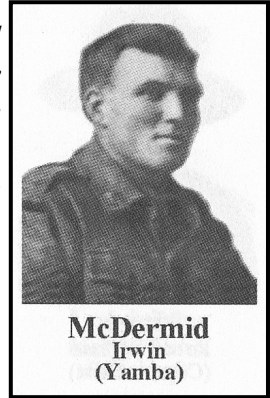
People and events from Clarence and Richmond Examiner, March 1915 compiled from microfilms held at Yamba Museum.

June 1915 - Irwin “Widge” McDermid

A farewell was held on 2nd June 1915 at Yamba School of Arts for Irwin “Widge” McDermid on the eve of his departure for WW1. The chairman said he was “the first and only of our lads that have showed their pluck by enlisting for the front”. Fifty couples danced to music by Mrs Craig, Mrs Smithers, Misses Lizzie Carr, Redman and Lollback. Speeches by D Tulloch, Jenkins, Perkins, Craig, Carr and Cox, who all spoke well of him. He was presented with a set of military brushes, a fountain pen, a Bible, 4 pairs of knitted woollen socks and an autograph book. Mr Connor, second son of Dr Connor was also present before leaving for the front.

Over 200 people gathered at the residence of Abe Carr (an uncle of Widge) on Micalo Island for another farewell to Irwin “Widge” McDermid. Another recruit, Gunga Datt, an Indian, was also present and both received parting gifts. Speeches by Messrs Jenkins, Abe Carr, Charles Phillips & Mrs Drury.

Irwin “Widge” was the fourth son of Donald and Maria (nee Carr) McDermid, born 30 December 1895 at Romiaka Island. He enlisted on 09 June 1915 and embarked from Sydney on H.M.A.T. “Agylshire” on 30 September 1915 with 1st Battalion, 9th Reinforcements. He saw active service on the Somme in France and lost his left eye as well as having shrapnel imbedded in his face. He was invalided home on 1st February 1918 and took up farming pursuits on the Lower Clarence



PRESIDENT’S AWARD APRIL

This month Marea presented the award to Denise & Jeremy Moss for their assistance in organising the construction of the new shed extension and ongoing general maintenance throughout the year. Denise also assists in our Research Department.

DIARY DATES - May

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| Friday 12th | Members’ Meeting—2pm
Show & Tell—Military badges & medals
from our collection. |
| Friday 19th | Committee Meeting—2pm |
| Friday 15th | Members’ Meeting - 2pm |
| Thursday 21st | MA Conference Sydney |