

ANZAC DAY 2020
‘RIFLE SHOOTERS ANSWER THE CALL’
by
BRUCE A. R. SCOTT, CSC, ADC

INTRODUCTION

It has often been said that Australia came of age on the morning some 14 years after Federation. That may be true and perhaps that is why we hold the day in such high regard in our national calendar. It certainly is not to celebrate a great military victory, because the landing and subsequent battle at Gallipoli was certainly not that.

What is not widely known is the role played, after war was declared, by many members of the rifle clubs across Australia at the time. Australian rifle shooters willingly and in large numbers answered the ‘call to arms’ eagerly volunteering to do their duty and were thereby actively involved in ‘defining our great nation’.

In the early 1900s many Australian country towns had rifle clubs and these clubs were in integral part of the social fabric of these small communities. The consequences of the Great War were enormous and many of our small towns were inflicted with the persistent pain of losing much loved members of their communities.

As we experience an ‘unusual’ ANZAC Day commemoration in 2020 due to the community restrictions resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, I ask all National Rifle Association of Australia clubs and members to remember and reflect on the commitment, some of which resulted in the ultimate sacrifice, that was made by our club members during the Great War and the conflicts that followed.

Using Townsville as an example, I will highlight the experiences of one emerging country town in the early 1900s and use that community to amplify the dedication and commitment of our rifle club members of the past. To achieve this, I will address:

- some statistics relevant to Townsville and Australia,
- Australia’s first response to war being declared and Townsville’s involvement, and
- two Townsville families who gave so much.

SOME STATISTICS

The Great War can not be discussed without considering some sobering statistics. From various sources, the figures relating to Townsville’s population leading up to the Great War include:

- 1881 – 3,032
- 1911 – 13,678 (1911 census)
- 1914 – 15,000 (the author’s best guess)

Noting Australia’s population in 1914 was 4.75 million, the statistics that might be deemed relevant to the Great War are:

- 417,000 enlisted = 8.8% of the population
- 60,000 killed in WW1 = 14.4% of those who enlisted = 1.3% of population
- 8,709 killed at Gallipoli (during the 8 month campaign) = 14.5% of all those killed in WW1

- 12,000 killed in October 1917 – Battle of Passchendaele = 20% of Australians killed in WW1



The Townsville Cenotaph lists 172 names which represents 1.2% of Townsville's expected population of the day. 17 were killed at Gallipoli which is 10% of Townsville's soldiers killed in the Great War.

The Townsville Rifle Club statistics are worth highlighting:

- 85 club members fought in WW1
- 17 were killed = 20% of the club
- Eight club members were killed at Gallipoli (only five names appear on the Cenotaph)



TOWNSVILLE RIFLE CLUB, AUGUST, 1907.

BACK ROW : Peter Fraser, Tom Andison, M. McWhinney, Andrews. SECOND ROW : W. Quaid, J. D. Walker, J. McWhinney, H. Donald, Staff Officer, Lieutenant Conner, G. P. Foot, J. Quaid, H. D. Foot, Arthur Pearce. THIRD ROW : Cunningham, Reg. Barnett, Jim Miller, Geo. Murray, J. S. Gill, W. E. Blackwell, A. H. Tait, Jack Philp, R. J. Sherriff. FRONT : J. Botten, W. E. McIlwaine, W. Robertson.

The Townsville Rifle Club statistics are not surprising because rifle clubs across Australia were an integral part of, firstly Queensland's defence strategy and then the National defence strategy after Federation. Rifle clubs were closely governed by the Department of the Army until the early 1960s.

By the end of the war, it is estimated that 28,000 members of Australian rifle clubs enlisted for service abroad with the Expeditionary Forces. 5,316 members of rifle clubs in Queensland answered the call and enlisted with 568 of them paying the ultimate sacrifice so future generations could enjoy the freedoms that exist today. It is not known how many rifle club members were lost across all Australian rifle clubs.

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST RESPONSE TO WAR – THE DIRTY 500

This is a very unusual and unique story - it's about Australia's first involvement and action in World War 1. It's a truly North Queensland story and it's about the small communities that came together. Even though the 'Dirty 500' were not engaged in the combat, it's still very important that they chose to serve Australia and leave their communities behind, not knowing what was in front of them.

When war was declared in Australia on 5th August 1914, the most immediate military threats lay to Australia's north in German New Guinea and on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. Australia's first response was to form the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF) in Sydney to capture German wireless radio stations in the South Pacific.

North Queensland's Kennedy Regiment was called on to help but was under-strength. North Queensland rifle club members aged between 18-60 were called upon to provide the additional troops needed by the Regiment.



The Kennedy Regiment marching to the SS Kanowna at Townsville on 8th August 1914

Troops departed Townsville on the SS Kanowna on 8th August 1914 and stopped in Cairns to pick up the final rifle club member volunteers, before continuing to a garrison on Thursday Island.

When the Sydney forces arrived on 5th September 1914, the Commander, Colonel W Holmes, declared the North Queensland troops unfit for service. He reported that he was very unhappy with what he saw. He felt the person who was commanding the Kanowna troops was lacking in military experience and personality and self-reliance, and didn't have the strength of character to cope with the situation.

The troops were equipped with only one set of clothing, which they'd been wearing for the weeks without a change, they had no bunks or hammocks, and were sleeping on the decks of the ships. They had no mess tables so they had to collect their food from the kitchen and sit on the decks to eat it. The men had very little water available for washing.



SS Kanowna at Townsville 8th August 1914

The Kanowna had no facilities for condensing steam from the ships boilers to make fresh water, so it was totally dependent on the water that it carried in its tanks before they set out.

The Kanowna carried about 500 troops – hence the ‘Dirty 500’.

Disappointingly, Colonel Holmes would have clearly known the capability provided by rifle club members as he was actively involved in rifle club administration nationally from 1903 and in 1912 was a Vice President of the New South Wales Rifle Association. He knew they were only issued with one uniform.

The Kanowna troops decided to persevere, but not far out of Port Moresby there was a mutiny on the ship. The stokers on the Kanowna had been complaining for some time they did not have enough water for washing. They were covered in coal dust, and there was not enough water to keep them hydrated - they stopped stoking the ship's boilers.

Colonel Holmes ordered the Kanowna back to Townsville harbour and Dirty 500 be disbanded. On 10th September 1914 they were discharged without fanfare or acclaim. When they got back they were disappointed - they had badly wanted to continue to Rabaul.

Townsville Rifle Club members included in the 'Dirty 500' were:

- Lieutenant Hutton Armstrong, a 24 year old clerk, who died at Gallipoli on 10th May 1915;
- Lance Corporal Henry Foot, a 31 year old grazier, who died at Gallipoli on 1st May 1915;
- Lance Corporal Maximillian Horwitz, a 23 year old labourer, who died at Gallipoli on 7th August 1915; and
- Private Roderick Bruce, a 30 year old labourer, who fought at Gallipoli but died in France on 13th April 1918.

All four served with Major Hugh Quinn in 15th Battalion at Gallipoli. Hugh Quinn, a 26 year old Townsville public accountant and auditor, was killed at Gallipoli on 29th May 1915. He was also one of the 'Dirty 500' and a member of the Kennedy Regiment Rifle Club.

Of note, Colonel Holmes, as a Brigadier, went on to command 5th Brigade at Gallipoli and France, including the battles of Pozieres and Flers. In 1917 he was promoted to Major General and commanded 4th Division at the battles of Bullecourt and Messines. He died of wounds from artillery fire in July 1917.

TOWNSVILLE'S BAXTER AND FOOT FAMILIES

Of the family names that appear on the Townsville Cenotaph, Baxter and Foot are of particular interest.

The Baxter Family

All three men in the Baxter family fought during the Great War. Neil and Duncan Baxter, both members of the Townsville Rifle Club, enlisted a little over a year apart. Angus McDonald Baxter who enlisted with his father, Duncan, survived the war.

Neil Baxter, one of six children, was a 21 year old farmer when he enlisted on 16th November 1914.



He was educated at the Central State School in Townsville and later attended the Gatton College before working on the Baxter farm at Alligator Creek.

An undated letter from Sergeant Jack Craven written to Duncan Baxter, states that *'Neil went missing from the affair on 27th April, and that there is very little hope of him being alive. Neil was out with George Rogers on the outpost and men were seen to drop everywhere, but it was impossible to see who they were.'* George Rogers, an 18 year old Townsville salesman, was one of the few to make it back, only to die in Sergeant Craven's arms.

At this time his father Duncan had his appendix removed, and while under sedation had a 'vision' and a conversation with Neil. He could not accept Neil's death and wrote to many authorities in the hope that Neil was alive and a prisoner of the Turks. Eventually, in January 1916, Duncan and his second son Angus enlisted.

Some years after the Great War, a soldier from West Australia returned to the Mayor of Townsville the bible he had found on the battlefield at Gallipoli, with Neil Baxter's name and home town address inscribed by his father.

1308 Private Neil Baxter's name appears on the Lone Pine Memorial at Panel 74 which implies his body was never found or identified.

Duncan Baxter, one of five children, was born in Scotland and was a Sergeant in the 1st Lanark Royal Engineers Volunteer Corps from 1890 to 1903.



He and his family settled in Australia by 1904 joining Duncan's brother Neil in Townsville. When older brother Neil died in 1908, Duncan became the owner of a cabinet and furniture making business.

On 17th January 1916 Duncan and his son Angus enlisted in Townsville. Duncan had reduced his age to enlist and because of his time with the Royal Volunteer Engineers, Lanarkshire and earlier 4th VB Scottish Rifles he was promoted to Company Quarter Master Sergeant in 42nd Battalion. On 17th March 1917 while standing next to his son Angus a shell landed severely wounding both of Duncan's feet.

The force of the blast blew the belt from son Angus. Duncan was transferred to hospital in Boulogne where he succumbed to his wounds on 31st March.

1200 Quarter Master Sergeant Duncan Baxter is buried at Boulogne Eastern Cemetery on the west coast of France.

Angus Baxter survived the Great War and became the Queensland Manager of the Australian Estates Pastoral Company.

Of note, the Townsville City Council meeting table was made by Duncan's brother Neil Baxter.

The Foot Family

Alfred and Mary Foot raised a family of 10, five boys and five girls, on Cardington Station on the Haughton River between Woodstock and Mingela, south-west of Townsville towards Charters Towers. The children were born between 1882 and 1900. Four of the five boys, Henry, George, Eric and Alexander, fought during the Great War while the youngest, Alfred, born in 1900, stayed at home to help his father run the property.

George, Henry and Alexander Foot were members of the Townsville Rifle Club and their sister Couchie was also a shooter. Couchie married another club member, William McIlwaine who was a member of the Dirty

500 and served as an officer in the Army in German New Guinea. William McIlwaine was Captain of the Townsville Rifle Club 1913, 1919 and 1921 and became Chairman of the North Queensland Rifle Association 1924 to 1932.



Henry Daintree Foot, the eldest of the brothers, attended Townsville Grammar School from 1894 to 1899 and was a grazier at the outbreak of the Great War. As a member of the Townsville Rifle Club, he volunteered for the 'Dirty 500' for the ill-fated voyage to German New Guinea. One week after returning from German New Guinea, Henry as a 31 year old enlisted in Townsville on 17th September 1914. He was allocated to 15th Battalion which suffered horribly at Gallipoli. Lance Corporal Henry Foot was killed at Quinns Post at Gallipoli on 1st May 1915. He was almost certainly serving with Hugh Quinn at the time.

135 Lance Corporal Henry Daintree Foot's name appears on the Lone Pine Memorial at Panel 75 which implies his body was never found or identified.

George Pierce Foot, enlisted on the same day as brother Henry and is likely to have also attended Townsville Grammar School. George's enlistment papers showed he was 29 years old, single and listed his occupation as Bushman. George was allocated to 5th Light Horse Machine Gun Section and fought at Gallipoli and later in the Middle East. He suffered a severe gunshot wound to his thigh on 13th August 1916 which resulted in him being returned to Australia for discharge as a Sergeant in January 1917.

Eric Douglas Foot, enlisted on 15th May 1917 in Cairns after two of his brothers, Henry and Alexander, were killed and brother George had been returned to Australia having endured a severe gunshot wound to his thigh. Eric's enlistment papers showed he was a 27 year old farmer from the Herberton area who was married to Hilda and they had one child. Eric, along with his brother Henry, was a member of the Dirty 500 which deployed in August 1914 to German New Guinea. This suggests Eric may have been a member of a rifle club on the Atherton Tableland. Eric Foot was allocated to 4th Pioneer Battalion and fought in Europe before returning to Australia and being discharged on 14th August 1919.

Alexander Madden Foot, enlisted in Townsville on 18th September 1914 one day after his older brothers, Henry and George. He was 22 years of age, single and listed his occupation as Stockman working on the family property, Cardington Station. Alexander had attended the Townsville Grammar School from 1904 to 1908 and was a member of the School Cadets. He was initially allocated to an infantry battalion but, given he was a stockman by trade, he desperately wanted to serve with his brother George, a bushman, in the Light Horse. While undergoing training at Enoggera he successfully transferred to 5th Light Horse and became the Assistant Groom to the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Hubert Harris who from 1911-12 had been Chairman of the Queensland Rifle Association.



Alexander found himself in Egypt for much of 1915 tending to the horses while the remainder of the Light Horse troopers were sent to fight on foot at Gallipoli. He occasionally saw some of his rifle club mates as they passed through, including Lieutenant Hutton Armstrong who was killed at Quinns Post on 10th May. Alexander learned, several months after the event, that his older brother Henry had been killed on 1st May 1915 at Quinns Post.

Members of 5th Light Horse continued to reinforce Gallipoli but the grooms were exempt as the horses needed caring for.

On 31st July 1915, Lieutenant Colonel Harris was killed at Gallipoli and Alexander expected that he could at last be released from his groom's duties to go off and fight. This did not occur and he was later advised it was because he had an exemplary record. Finally, Alexander decided he would defy orders and travel to see some far off sights in Egypt hoping to be disciplined and sent to Gallipoli. His wish came true and in early November he arrived at Gallipoli and was fortunate enough to catch up with his brother George on the peninsular. Shortly thereafter Alexander Foot was killed on 22nd November 1915 and his last diary note reads: *'Somehow a fellow seems to get very little time to himself to either read or write. I'm not hankering to get back yet but I really feel as if I am earning my pay.'*

244 TROOPER Alexander Foot is buried at Shell Green Cemetery on the Gallipoli Peninsular.

CONCLUSION

Townsville's statistics are not remarkable but might be representative of most small Australian country towns of the day. The Townsville community, with an expected population of approximately 15,000, certainly committed to the Great War effort thereby becoming an active participant in 'defining our Nation' - a nation we all love so dearly. All Australian country towns, many also with rifle clubs, were similarly committed to the Great War with many families having loved ones buried on far off lands..

Unsurprisingly but largely forgotten, rifle club members, were among the first called upon at the declaration of war on 5th August 1914 with many boarding the SS Kanowna in Townsville on 8th August 1914 bound for German New Guinea. This beginning to the Great War was a disappointment for all members of the Dirty 500 but it did not deter many from enlisting in the AIF a week after returning to Townsville. This presents an insight into the men's determination and attitudes and reflects positively on the character of the Townsville community in 1914.

Many families lost loved ones to the horrors of the Great War but not all suffered as badly as the Baxter and Foot families of Townsville. A father and his youngest son enlisted after his eldest son was killed at Gallipoli and later the father lost his life in France with his youngest son witnessing the explosion that removed his father's feet. A brother enlisted after two of his brothers had been killed at Gallipoli and a third was returned to Australia with a severe gunshot wound to his thigh.

We must never forget the sacrifices made by Australians during the Great War and all other conflicts that followed. Equally, we must never take for granted the losses suffered by the families that lived on without their loved ones after the various conflicts ended.

Today, ANZAC Day is set aside for us to remember those, including our rifle club members, who have served our country in all conflicts, to reflect upon their unselfish service and to embrace the history that has defined our country – at this time each year we keep that history alive through reflecting on the past.

LEST WE FORGET

Information contained within this speech has been gathered from:

- a. The Townsville Cenotaph World War 1 Soldiers by Carolyn Lee Larard & Maureen Newnham (2017)
- b. QRA's History – 'Home on the Range' (2011)
- c. NQRA's History – 'So You Went Target Rifle Shooting' launched on 17th May 2019
- d. The Riflemen – A history of the National Rifle Association of Australia 188-8-1988 by Andrew J Kilsby (2013)
- e. National Archives of Australia – World War 1 Soldier Records
- f. ABC - 'Dirty 500' Queenslanders Honoured in WW1 Centenary Tribute
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-11/dirty-500-queenslanders-honoured-in-wwi-tribute/5663436>
- g. Trooper Alexander M Foot's 1914-1915 private letters to his sister at Cardington Station
- h. Keeping Our Heritage, Townsville Museum and Historical Society 1985-2015 by Geoff Hansen (2019)