

This is the story of my great-grandfather, Andrew Stewart Duncan, and his service during World War One at Gallipoli and the Western Front - Andrew Palmer.

Sergeant Andrew Stewart Duncan

Service Number	157
Roll title	10 Infantry Battalion (October 1914)
Date of embarkation	20 October 1914
Place of embarkation	Adelaide
Ship embarked on	HMAT <i>Ascanius</i> A11



Gallipoli

Andrew enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 20 August 1914. He was assigned to the 10th Battalion and with his previous military experience in the Boer War, Andrew was assigned the rank of Sergeant. Andrew's battalion set sail on the transport *Ascanius* from Adelaide on 20 October, 1914.

The 10th Battalion was part of the 3rd Brigade, the covering force for the Anzac landing and among the first ashore at Gallipoli at 4:30am on 25 April.

For the next 96 hours the men of the 10th Battalion experienced continuous fighting, shattered nerves and little or no sleep. During the fighting Andrew was reported missing. He was later found, with severe shrapnel wounds to his back. He was ferried from the beach out to the ship *Ionian*. Medical staff on the ship assessed the soldiers arriving: the dead or dying were to be placed in the hold of the ship, in a makeshift morgue. When Andrew's condition was assessed he heard a voice say, "Put him in the hold". As Andrew was being taken to the morgue, he managed to say, "Give us a bloody drink". Those words probably saved his life, as he was moved to lie with the wounded.

Andrew was evacuated to hospital in Egypt. His condition was recorded as "dangerously ill", but his wife Jane received the standard notification that "Sergeant Duncan is not reported seriously wounded. In the absence of further reports Egypt advises all wounded to be progressing satisfactorily".

Andrew rejoined his battalion at Gallipoli on 8 July 1915. He was promoted to Company Sergeant Major and remained at Anzac until the 10th Battalion left in late November as the evacuation preparations began.

Poizieres

After the evacuation of Gallipoli, Andrew was stationed in Egypt, and then shipped to France. He took part in the attack on Poizieres on 23 July 1916. He was wounded in action on 24 July, at the start of a fierce and relentless German artillery bombardment that continued for days. Suffering from shell shock and a leg injury from an exploding shell he was sent to England.

Despite having a long recovery ahead of him, Andrew was fortunate to have been hospitalized before the intense fighting to hold Poizieres and take Mouquet Farm. By the time the AIF was relieved at Poizieres in early September they had suffered more than 23,000 casualties; almost 7,000 dead or missing, 17,000 wounded.

Andrew made a slow recovery. He was finally ready to return to duty in March 1917. He spent the next 6 months conducting officer training at camps in England.

In September Andrew rejoined his battalion in the mud and the mire near Passchendale just after the 3rd Battle of Ypres.

Prisoner of War

On the night of 1 March 1918 Andrew Duncan was reported missing in action, presumed captured. D Company was at Hollebecke, Flanders, just south of Ypres. The night was very dark. The 10th Battalion came under heavy shelling and the Germans raided D Company headquarters. Several men were captured, including Andrew. Their commanding officer was shot and killed.

While crossing No Man's Land back to the German lines, a shell exploded in their midst. Andrew received minor leg injuries.

Andrew was interrogated for an hour in the German trenches, then made to march for about 6 hours to a town behind the lines. He was interrogated, relocated, and then interrogated again.

He was held in a cell for about 17 days and daily interrogated. He thought that he was going to be killed. Andrew was made to stand barefoot. A German soldier held a rifle by the barrel, the rifle stock hovering a distance above Andrew's toes. Andrew would be asked a question. Whenever his response was unsatisfactory, the rifle stock would be dropped on his toes. The interrogation left Andrew with crushed, misshapen toes and no toenails.

Next Andrew was moved again. He later recalled, "There were 280 of us in a room that could not properly accommodate 50. It was a frightful experience and we suffered it for 13 days".

Andrew was then transferred between Prisoner of War camps, his final camp being Springhirsch in Schleswig-Holstein. He described the conditions as "unspeakably disgusting".

Meanwhile, the Red Cross was trying to confirm Andrew's whereabouts. He was presumed captured, but without confirmation of his fate, Andrew would not receive Red Cross parcels. He would have to live in the clothes in which he was captured, probably unwashed and lice-ridden, and survive on camp rations. He must have been desperately hungry.

On July 1 Andrew wrote to his wife Jane, saying, "It is four months to-day since I was taken prisoner, and up to the present time have not received any of the bread and grocery parcels that the Red Cross send out to every prisoner of war. I hope it won't be very long before my parcels start to arrive, as I am just about as low as it is possible to be without breaking down altogether, and I don't want that to happen, as I don't think it would be possible to get up again if once I did break down".

Finally, by August, Andrew had started receiving food packets and replacement clothing.

Prisoners like Andrew who were held deep inside Germany may not have had any indication that the war was coming to an end. News of the Armistice may have been delayed and probably came as a surprise. Once the news arrived, Andrew would have had no choice but to wait in Germany for Allied forces to reach the camp. It took 6 more weeks for Andrew to reach England.

Andrew finally left Springhirsch camp on 15 December 1918. After a week at a hospital in Denmark, Andrew set sail for England. After a debrief and a period of leave in the UK, Andrew arrived back in Australia on 29 June 1919.

Postwar

Andrew called Victoria home after the war and married into gold-mining family in Beaufort. Andrew must have found it a challenge to settle back into civilian life. He still carried the shrapnel from Gallipoli in his back. When the shrapnel moved he would have to take to bed for days or even weeks. He reluctantly had to give up manual work and found employment as Registrar of Births and Deaths in Beaufort.

Andrew's wartime experience in Germany came in handy during World War II in Beaufort. During the Second World War Beaufort built a signal bonfire on Camp Hill, overlooking the township. This was to be lit should the town come under attack. At this time Andrew was employed as Paymaster for the forestry workers on Mount Cole, some of whom were migrants. He overheard some of the workers speaking in German, making plans to light the bonfire and loot the Beaufort shops. The Germans thought that they could plan in secret if they used their mother tongue, but Andrew had picked up a smattering of German during his time as a prisoner of war and he understood the plan. When the German forestry workers arrived at Camp Hill and the bonfire, they found soldiers and police waiting for them.