

This Military history of Albert Edward Renshaw is through the eyes of perception with facts intermingled with family stories and war diaries.

The story is of Albert Edward Renshaw the first Renshaw boy to be born in Australia. Albert had enlisted in the Great War to fight for King and Country. The story is also the mourning of his mother waiting to hear news, never believing he had died after receiving conflicting cablegrams. Firstly having news informing her that he was wounded but not mortally, then another cablegram announcing he was in hospital in Alexandria and yet another cablegram came telling he had returned to Australia.

It took years with the Army and Red Cross conducting an enquiry, the Army then to pronounce Albert Edward Renshaw had died from wounds at Gallipoli on 26th April 1915.

In the year 1883, the Renshaw family, John Charles, his pregnant wife Sarah, their four year old son Peter and baby James were leaving Lancashire England. It was an appalling journey of forty eight days till they arrived in Queensland Cooktown on the 21st August 1883 aboard the ship Duke of Westminster. They undertook a journey that would change their lives; little did they know that their family would become part of Australia's Anzac military history.

In 1891 only eight years after arriving in Queensland, this innovative and adventurous family moved yet again and made their home in South Melbourne with their children Sarah Alice one year, Albert Edward four and half years, Joseph seven years and Peter who was the eldest at thirteen, leaving more children at rest in England, and Queensland. Again the family grew, but the heartbreak with the death of more children created another burden for Sarah. Another two children were buried in Melbourne; a loss of nine children.

It was 20th August 1914 at 95 Glenlyon Street Brunswick where the ANZAC story of Albert Edward Renshaw commenced. Albert, also known as Bert, was the first Australian son born to John and Sarah. Albert was a 27 year old boilermaker five foot nine and half inches tall, weighed ten stone, six pounds and had a fair complexion with blue eyes and brown hair.

Albert voluntarily enlisted in Melbourne on 20th August 1914 joining the 2nd Field Company Engineers, First A.I.F. as a Sapper No. 178 just sixteen days after Britain had declared war on Germany and a mere two days after the Second Field Company had been formed.



95 Glenlyon Street Brunswick as it is today.



Sapper Albert Edward Renshaw No 178

20th August 1914, Thursday, I remember this date.

After work on a cold Melbourne winter blast, I met up with my mate Macca (William McIntosh) and we decided to enlist and volunteer to go to war. I do not know who was more excited, Macca or me. We were going to look good in uniform. Everyone was talking about the war, there were large signs being put up around the streets, posters and leaflets in pubs, even signs up under the clocks at Flinders Street Station. Enlistment booths were being opened all over Melbourne and the Town Hall has been giving out recruitment papers for the last ten days.

War had been declared August 10th between Britain and Germany and orders came through to the Battery at Port Nepean to prevent any German flagged ships attempting to leave Port Philip Bay. It took just one shot across the bow of the German steamer, Pfalz to convince the captain to stop and the vessel was impounded with the crew which disembarked at Portsea. We were at war and yes, Macca and I were needed for King and Country.

We joined the queue at Alexander Parade and with our engineering background thought we could enlist as engineers, be officers and see the world together.

What an incongruous couple as best mates go, both of us were five foot nine and half inches tall but there the similarity ended. Whilst I had blue eyes, light brown hair and fair complexion, Macca had brown eyes, black hair and dark complexion. I was more handsome than Macca but I am not sure the girls thought this was so? Macca was turner whilst I had my boilermaker's certificate and we have been mates forever.

The excitement of overseas travel was upon me, I only knew the areas of South Melbourne and Brunswick but Mum reminded me that I was born in Queensland and left there when I was five years old to come to South Melbourne Victoria. I was a travelled person.

Recruiting offices in Melbourne opened on 10th August 1914. As volunteers we had to go through strict physical fitness guidelines and when we enlisted I was surprised at the paperwork.

"Name" the voice boomed across the table	"Albert"
"State full name son"	"Albert Edward Renshaw"
"Date of Birth"	"27 th October 1886"
"Occupation" asked the soldier without looking up	"Boilermaker" I replied.

More and more questions were being fired at me and as I looked around I saw soldiers organising and directing men and boys to fill out more forms. It was very orderly.

"Take this form with you and sit down and wait in front of those screens at the far end of the room where you will be examined by the doctor" directed the soldier.

I spied a ring of chairs where already candidates were waiting by the screens, some of whom were already in deep conversation. I looked over to find my mate Macca and saw he had already been through the process. Soon it was my time for the medical. I was prodded, coughed, measured and checked for scars, height, weight and he even checked my teeth.

After my session I met up with Macca and asked "Did you get a number, mine is Sapper 178 in the 2nd Field Company Engineers" Australian Imperial Forces. Macca replied "My number is Sapper 172 in the same company". "Well are we going to be officers" No, I patted him on the back like an older brother, "Let's go to the pub for a drink before heading home". Our adventures were about to begin.

When signing up they told us it was only to be for six months, it will be like a holiday and we will be back in Melbourne next summer for the cricket. Dad will not miss me at work as my brothers Peter and Joseph will be able to fill in for this short time.

Then my excitement abated, I was apprehensive, I had to go home and tell Mum and Dad. They didn't know.

Even though I was twenty seven I was still living at home at 95 Glenlyon Road in East Brunswick and worked as a boilermaker with Dad at his engineering business. It was called J.C. Renshaw & Co. in Queensbridge Street South Melbourne. My older brother Peter was the foreman and Joseph bosses me even though I am a qualified boiler maker.

I hadn't told Mum and Dad. When talking about the war around our kitchen table at tea time Dad had told me that Grandfather William served in England and all things military were a secret and all wars were futile. I knew Mum was going to be furious at me as she was still grieving for the nine children she has lost, my brothers and sisters. All were very young. The three babies she left to memory in England and John, only one year old, which died aboard ship "Westminster" when the family was emigrating from England. Travelling from Cooktown and in Ipswich Queensland three more children passed into memory. When they moved to South Melbourne two more babies died.

Mum never talked to us about these children but we all knew that Mum was always sad and held us as her precious children, Peter, Joseph, myself, Alice, Mary and Ada.

Mum had a difficult life being a mother of fifteen children. When I told her I had volunteered and was going away to war she hugged me and cried. When I hugged her back I broke down and cried too, she told me I was special being her first born son in Australia and hoped I would not go. Then Dad put his arms around me and reluctantly gave me his approval.

Mum was still crying and I think she will be sad until I come back.

Whilst we were stationed in the Engineering Barracks in Melbourne I learn a lot. We camped at the barracks in tents and from there we marched, drilled, made bridges and kept up our physical training. The bridge making was easy as I had helped Dad at work but I am not sure if the others had any experience.

I could not believe how young some of my fellow sappers were. Surely they could not be eighteen. As I was one of the oldest in the group I think they were happy to talk to me and tell me their fears. Many were from country Victoria and this was not only their first time in a big City but the first time they had been away from home. How homesick they were!

We route marched down Flinders and Collins Street, recruiting more volunteers as we looked so good in our uniforms, our great hats, muskets and bayonets on our shoulders and the perfect lines were mentioned by many in the crowd. Mum always came to watch these marches.

Back to barracks with more training and route marches. Once we marched to Templestowe and set up camp in the bush, whilst doing tactical exercises. I had never been to Templestowe, it was so far away and difficult to get there, and even though we thought we were fit the training was very tiring. It was announced, "No leaving the Barracks, no going home or to dances" but more training, bivouac and tactical exercises were carried out.

We had become a fighting team, there were two hundred and seven in our unit and most of us were locals; even five were from Brunswick, I only knew them by sight. Others were from every corner of Victoria and from every occupation. We also had enlistments from Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania. As we trained we became familiar with each other's history and we listened to stories of why they enlisted and what they all wanted from this voyage to the other side of the world. So many stories; some wanted to travel, others couldn't wait for the confrontation to be over and to go home how different we all were.

Our training has gone on for such a long time, we were sure that we were never going to leave Victoria. We all thought "The war will be over before we get there".

21st October 2014 was another memorable date.

Two hundred and seven 2nd Field Company Engineers marched to Port Melbourne to embark for England on the Ship A.3. 'ORVIETO'. Whilst we marched other soldiers were coming by train from Broadmeadows. Dad even closed his business to take the family, Mum my brothers Peter and Joseph and my sisters, Alice, Mary and Ada to the Railway Station pier at Port Melbourne where they waved me on my way.

The HMAT Orvieto was one of the largest ships to embark from Port Melbourne, carrying 1,457 men and women, representing Victoria's significant contribution to World War I.

It weighed 12,130 tons with an average cruise speed of 15 knots. It was owned by the Orient SN CO Ltd. London and leased by the Commonwealth until 29th December 1914. It formed part of the first convoy of the AIF. Our 2nd Field Company Engineers (Victoria) 5th Infantry Battalion (Victoria) and 2nd Infantry Brigade made up the First Division to embark at Melbourne. The Orvieto is the flagship of the fleet and is leading in the centre. We all walked tall.

The boarding of the A3 Orvieto was orderly and First Division including our 2nd Field Company Engineers boarded taking hours. Each carrying our kits in our cloth bags containing all our worldly goods, whilst shouldering our muskets and bayonets and proudly wearing our uniforms, even the musical instruments were carried on board.

Then the Governor General Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson and his wife came on board the ship to farewell us. The 5th Battalion band played the National Anthem and we stood to attention when we said at precisely 15.45. Off to see the world.

The smoke belled over the crowd as we sailed and watched the crowd, many were waving handkerchiefs or putting up umbrellas so they could be seen by their loved one, I am sure I saw my family, all cheering as if the louder the noise the earlier we would arrive home safely.

As we sailed into Port Phillip Bay Lieutenant Colonel William Throsby Bridges, Commander of the First Australian Division stood on the deck. I had a great position to watch Melbourne recede into the distance, right on the railing next to the stairs. As more troops were climbing to reach this deck and because of the tight spaces near the stairs the Sarg. pushed me on the arm and ordered me not to impede the progress, I lost my advantage point, Not very happy!

Sailing through Port Phillip heads it was a bit rough, no time to sightsee as we still continued our daily routine of our exercises including many push ups. By now we were all very proficient but a strict eye was upon us if we made a mistake. Sometimes when we were on deck it felt like we were packed so tightly that we couldn't have fallen over. The officers were continually checking on us and even filming us. We were told this film was to be called the Australian Commonwealth Military Forces, Life on Board the A3 (Orvieto) A3 HMAT Orvieto. When we entered the Great Australian Bight we were seasick. Took the Mothersill pills given to us but until we reached Western Australia I could not find my sea legs. When we sailed into King Georges Sound Western Australia in November we felt we were trained and ready to fight. We stay at Albany Western Australia for about a week, not allowed to go ashore.

November 1st 1914 The AIF departed Albany in Western Australia, "What a Sight"! We were the First Convoy of twenty eight Australian transports which carried troops not only from Australia but also from New Zealand. They came on ships with their own escort. The convoy of ten New Zealand Transports and the Warships, HMS Minotaur, HMAS Sydney, HMAS Melbourne and the Japanese Battle Cruiser Ibuki.

We were originally to go to England; however we had several delays due to the presence of German naval vessels in the Indian Ocean so we were re-routed instead to Alexandria, Egypt. Steaming onwards, no slacking any day, we kept training, more knotting, lashing, infantry drills, and musketry exercises. Many were still seasick but Macca and I were amongst the lucky ones.

Spare time was spent playing cards, smoking and writing more letters but smoking was forbidden on deck, blackout every night. Sometimes crying was heard so I kept a lookout for the younger soldiers.

November 13 1914 Blackout training, the fleet stopped and had no lights on whatsoever as we did our boat drill with life belts on. Little did we know that the "Emden" passed but did not see us? It was later when the "Sydney" sunk a coal collier that was loading the gun boat, that we heard that Sydney had sunk the "Emden"

3rd December 1914 Another day to remember, must write to Mum and Dad. What a lot I have to tell them. Peter and Joe will be amazed.

We arrived in Alexandria Egypt and we began our training in the desert, how hot it was! I cannot remember a Melbourne day this hot, glad we had our hats but our uniforms stuck to us and we were always looking for water and shade. After training for hours in the heat of the desert a few had to be taken to the hospital with heat exhaustion and dehydration. Then the night came and cold seeped into our bones. Some then caught pneumonia. Went to Mena Camp and did more marching, general field work, siege musketry and testing war equipment. There we helped construct girder and suspension bridges and received lectures on demolition. We were given colour patches to wear, ours were purple rectangles. Although we were used to hard physical training it became more intense in the desert.

2nd February 1915. I was charged for using insubordinate language to a superior officer and was awarded fourteen days confined to camp. I won't even write to my family about this! I only told him in uncertain words that I would not do what he wanted me to do. I suppose I was lucky I was not sent home like the others. Learn my lesson here: never answer back even if you are right.

4th April 1915 Easter Sunday Drills and work continued until 4th April. Easter Sunday, it's a new time now and we move from Mena Camp (Egypt) to the port to the HMT A13 Mashobra to sail to the Island of Lemnos.

9th April 1915 We steam for our destination, ANZAC Cove, the next six days are a blur.

From the 2nd Field Company Engineers War Diary. 25th April 1915 It's a Sunday

7am ANZAC Cove

Second Field Company disembarks in two parties. One party with Major Martyn in charge and the other under Lieut. Dawkins. The latter was divided into two squads. A party under Capt. Williams proceeded up Shrapnel Gully, whilst the remainder sank tube wells in various places at the foot of the gully. These two parties had been detailed for water supply and commenced to sink tube wells in various places.

11.00 am Whilst engaged on this work a barge drifted ashore near Hells Spit which was found to be laden and contained ammunitions and sappers took steps at once to unload same. This was carried on under heavy shrapnel fire and Sapper E.A. Edwards was wounded in arm.

4 pm No 1,3 and 4 sections of the Coy commenced immediately on landing to construct roads in direction of Kaba Tepe and towards the firing line and one track to the summit of Maclagan's Ridge was completed at 4pm and used to place first field gun in position. Gun was hauled into position by sappers. Good progress was made on road to Shrapnel Gully despite our being subject to heavy fire from direction of Gabe Tepe. During the afternoon a party was detailed to report to St. Col Elliott for pier construction. The remainder of the company immediately after disembarkation commenced the construction of two roads. One road from the landing place to Gabe Tepe, which became the main road to Shrapnel Valley and onto the summit on Maclagan's Ridge. The road was completed by 4.00 pm

4.30 pm The first field gun was hauled into position by 4.30 pm on Maclagan's Ridge by the same sappers and placed into position.

7.00 pm At 7 pm two and three sections constructed a trench along Pluggers Plateau and held until relieved by the New Zealand 3rd Infantry, Taranaki Rifles and then remained as reserves to this battalion until 11.am

12pm Whilst constructing trench Sappers A.E. Renshaw and J.F. Richards were wounded.

Before 12 pm, 25th April A.E. Renshaw was hit from behind digging trenches. He was carried through the scrub with much trouble by 171 Sapper Macintosh (2FC) and Sapper Crawford (6FC)

Sapper Renshaw was left in the care of Army Medical Corp on Anzac Beach. 171 Sapper Macintosh saw Sapper Renshaw 178 onto a boat towed by a pinnacle to the Hospital ship at about 2am on 26th April 1915.

Sapper Renshaw was not seen again.

"Slight rain fell during the night."

26th April 2015 is the 100th anniversary of the death of Sapper Renshaw.

Sapper Albert Edward Renshaw No 178 A.I.F.

I have been hit whilst digging the trench, fell down and Macca and Crawford carried me as carefully as they could through the bushes and down the path we had recently made. I hurt bad, so bad I am not sure where I was hit. Blood seems everywhere. My mates carried me, each arm on their shoulders as they locked their own arms under my legs down to the beach. All the while heavy gun fire was around us.

When we arrived at the beach Macca wouldn't leave me so I told him I was OK and to get back to the trenches, but he would not leave until I had been seen by the medical team.

Crawford said he would go back and to keep my chin up, I could see he was alarmed. Glad it was dark as I started to moan and I didn't want them to see my face, I couldn't help it I was suffering. Macca kept saying, you'll be alright mate, you'll be alright. I could hear him saying this over and over as I was placed on a boat towed by the pinnacle. "Goodbye Macca, see you in England".

The medics tried not to move me too much but the pain is growing and I am feeling worse. I cannot hear anything now and it is getting darker. I keep thinking of Mum, love you Mum.





Memorial at Anzac Cove by Kemal Atatürk

"Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives...

You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehments to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours...

You, the mothers, who sent their sons from faraway countries wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace, after having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well."

Ataturk, 1934



Lone Pine "Where the Australians Rest"

Roll of Honour

Albert Edward Renshaw

Service No 178

Rank Sapper

Unit 2nd Field Company, Australian Engineers

Service Australian Army

Conflict First World War, 1914-1918

Date of Death 26th April 1915

Place of Death Gallipoli, Ottoman Empire

Cause of Death Died of Wounds

Place of Association Brunswick, Australia

Cemetery or memorial Details Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli Peninsula, Canakkale Province, Turkey

Source AWM 145 Roll of Honour cards, 1914-1918 War, Army

Albert Edward Renshaw's name

Located at panel 254 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial

