

Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 42

ALEXANDER EASTON 1895 - 1954



The 9th Battalion AIF marching through Queen Street, Brisbane, 1914.

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Brisbane QLD 4000
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Private Alexander Easton

A buzz of mingled pride, eagerness and apprehension went round the 3rd Brigade of the Australian infantry when they were selected by General Bridges to be the 'covering party' (the first into action) in April 1915.

In 'C' Company of the 9th Battalion – the Queensland Battalion in the 3rd Brigade - was 19 year-old Private Alexander Easton.

Alexander was born in Toowoomba on 17 June 1895 to locomotive driver Alexander Easton and his wife Jane (nee Pettigrew), both from Scotland. In 1914 young Alexander – 5 feet 7 inches (170cm) tall with blue eyes and fair hair - was living in Vulture Street in Brisbane, working as a storeman, and attending Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

Alexander had had some militia training and on 9 September 1914 he enlisted in the 9th Battalion, in time for the Battalion's departure on 24 September on the *Omrah*. At Albany, WA the *Omrah* joined the imposing first convoy of Australian and New Zealand ships to the Middle East.



HMAT A5 *Omrah*

The HMAT A5 Omrah weighed 8,130 tons with an average cruise speed of 15 knots or 27.78 kmph. It was owned by the Orient SN Co Ltd, London, and leased by the Commonwealth until 10 February 1915. The Omrah was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean, 12 May 1918.

C Company of the 9th Battalion was onboard the destroyer *Beagle* in the very early hours of the morning of 25 April 1915, as the Anzacs made their landing at Gallipoli. Turkish defenders on high ground to the south saw the *Beagle* and opened up with rifle and machine gun fire. Bullets pattered on the high bows of the destroyer and thrashed up the water around the landing boats.

Immediately on reaching the beach C Company dropped their packs and charged at the Turks who were as close as 60 yards from the shore in low scrub and trenches. The infantry then hurried on – it had been drilled into the covering party they must press on inland as hard as they could go. C Company reached what was marked on their maps as ‘400 Plateau’, part of which became known as Lone Pine, and some stormed Turkish artillery nearby, before occupying Bolton’s Ridge for a time.

The day became more and more confused amid attacks, counter-attacks and relentless salvos from the Turkish artillery on a semi-circle of heights around 400 Plateau. After this maelstrom and further fighting on the next two days, a little over half of the men of the 9th Battalion were dead, wounded or missing.

On 19 May a huge Turkish attack along all the Anzac lines was repulsed with high numbers of Turkish casualties. The rifle-fire of the 9th Battalion swept away the attackers charging towards its trenches, but the defenders were then punished by heavy artillery barrages.

On 28 June an attack on Snipers Ridge was undertaken by two companies of the 9th Battalion, one being C Company. That company soon came under heavy shrapnel and machine-gun fire from both flanks. It was forced to retire having taken many casualties.

Alexander Easton survived these actions, as well as the daily sniping, frequent shelling and lesser attacks - but enemies were not confined to the Turks. Flies and lice thrived amid problems with sanitation and hygiene and bodies lying between the trenches. These pests helped the spread of dysentery, enteric fever and paratyphoid. Continuous hardship, fatigue and poor diet weakened the longer-serving Anzacs, making them easy prey for disease.



*Barges containing sick and wounded soldiers reaching the hospital ship. Summer 1915. Photo taken by Chaplain the Rev EN Merrington.
(Australian War Memorial Catalogue No. C2679)*

Alexander succumbed in the middle of August, with 'debility' and then 'enteric' diagnosed. He embarked on the *Karoola* on 30 October 1915 and back in Australia was discharged on 28 September 1916.

In 1917 in Warwick, Alexander married Elsie Vera Pettigrew, with Presbyterian rites. They had one son, Alexander Muir. Alexander senior lived in Warwick for many years working as a railway employee, and was a vice-president of the Warwick branch of the Returned Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia. At some point he and Elsie separated, and by 1953 he was residing at the Soldiers Rest Home, Coolangatta, passing away there on 29 August 1954, aged 59. His estate was divided between his son and two of his sisters (Evelyn and Mary).

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Lest we forget