

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 216

WILLIAM WASHINGTON KING

1893 - 1974



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Cover Illustration. *William Washington King, from the Pictorial supplement to The Queenslander, 27 November 1915.*

John Oxley Library, SLQ

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Sergeant William 'Bill' Washington King MM

Born the son of a 'dairyman' and brought up on the land, William Washington King travelled a considerable distance from Alstonville in New South Wales to Brisbane to enlist in 1915. He embarked with the 9th Battalion from Australia to Egypt from where he was sent to France.

William fought with the 49th Battalion in the trenches at Mouquet Farm and in early 1917 was part of the 13th Brigade's attack at Noreuil on 2 April; this followed the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line. As a result of his courage and tenacity exhibited over the next few days at Bullecourt, he was awarded the Military Medal; he had suffered, however, a serious injury which was to send him home.

Early life and family

William Washington King was born at Mudgee, New South Wales (NSW) on 19 January 1893.¹ Mudgee is situated in central NSW about 284 kms inland from Newcastle. William was the third child and eldest son of Moses King and Jane (nee McGill); he was one of 11 children born over 22 years to Moses and Jane.

William's father and his grandfather (also named Moses King) were farmers. His grandfather and grandmother came to Australia aboard *Sophia* from Fermagh (or County Fermanagh), Ireland in 1832 on assisted passage. William's father was born at Kiama in 1862 and his mother was born in 1870, 20 km away at Albion Park, NSW.

William's family moved several times, firstly from Lismore to Mudgee some 873 km south, and then to Kiama (another 360 km south); his grandfather's family lived at Kiama.

William's older sisters, Florence Isabella Janetta (1889) and Alice (1891) were born in Lismore; William and his younger sister Una Ivy Jane (1895) were born in Mudgee. The other siblings Edith Myra (1898), Ina Lillian (1900), Ethel Leonie (1902), James 'Jim' Albert Russell (1904), John 'Jack' Edward Dixon (1907), Sarah Evelyn (1909) and Alexander Stuart George (1912) were all born in Kiama, NSW.

The family had moved to Kiama in 1895 and William (or 'Bill', as the family called him), attended the Jamberoo Public School. The school, which is still flourishing today, lies in the Jamberoo Valley just west of Kiama. By 1913, the family had again moved to Alstonville, on the northern NSW coast (875 kms from Kiama and 187km south of Brisbane). William's father, Moses, was listed in the electoral rolls in 1913 as a 'dairyman'.

Enlistment and service

William was 22 years and 6 months at the time of enlistment and was farming in Alstonville, NSW. He was attested in Brisbane on 9 August 1915 where he gave his occupation as labourer and his religion as Presbyterian. He was 5'6" tall (168cm), 135 lbs (61kgs) with dark complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. His enlistment number was 3391 with the 9th Battalion, 11th Reinforcements.



He was later transferred to the 49th Battalion.²

William embarked from Brisbane on 21 October 1915 aboard the HMAT A48 *Seang Bee* for overseas service. His service records show he was ill with influenza and gastroenteritis when admitted to hospital in Malta and then transferred to County of London War Hospital, Epsom in late November 1915.

The 9th Battalion had arrived in Alexandria and the 49th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 27 February 1916 as part of the 'doubling' of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). Approximately half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 9th Battalion and the remainder were fresh reinforcements from Australia.³

As a private in the 9th Battalion Reinforcements at Zeitoun, near Cairo, Egypt, William was transferred to the 49th and promoted to Lance Corporal on 29 February 1916 at Tel-el-Kebir. The 49th Battalion was predominantly composed of men from Queensland. The battalion became part of the 13th Brigade of the 4th Australian Division.

On 5 June 1916 William left Alexandria aboard HT *Arcadian* arriving in Marseilles, France on 12 June 1916. His promotion to Lance Corporal is recorded again in his service record on 7 June 1916 and, on 24 August 1916, William was promoted to Corporal.

Once in France, the 49th soon moved into the trenches of the Western Front for the first time on 21 June 1916.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

H15927

*The destruction on the battlefield at Mouquet Farm,
October 1916*

It fought its first major battle at Mouquet Farm in August and suffered heavy losses, particularly in the assault launched on 3 September, 1916. Thirteen days later on 6 September (while still in France), William was promoted to Sergeant. The 49th Battalion saw out the rest of the year alternating between front-line duty, and training and labouring behind the line. This routine continued through the bleak winter of 1916-1917.

William's service records show that he attended a training course from 1-10 December 1916. His Divisional Commander made the following comments on his service record:

The Division Commander congratulates this Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) in having obtained very satisfactory reports at the Course 4th Army Telescopic Sight School which terminated on 10-12-16.

Early in 1917, the battalion participated in the advance that followed the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, supporting the 13th Brigade's attack at Noreuil on 2 April.

Awarded the Military Medal and wounded at Bullecourt

The recorded evidence of William's gallantry and recommendation for the Military Medal by the Officer in Charge of 49th Battalion reads as follows:

On the night of 5th April 1917, he carried out a reconnaissance of the enemy's position on railway cutting N.E. of Noreuil in a most courageous and efficient manner. On his return he guided the Company to the objective a distance of 1000 yards, and whilst with the Company holding on to the position he displayed great courage and resource in assisting to ward off counter attacks by the enemy, and in assisting the work of consolidation. He was subsequently wounded.

In response to a request from the Australian War Memorial historian in 1930 about his service, William forwarded a letter on 9 March 1930 about his service and, in particular, his time at Bullecourt; this letter is held at the AWM and a copy is shown in the online Photo Gallery. William's description of the events of the 5 April 1917 follows:

Awarded the Military Medal for leading a patrol 1400 yards (1280 metres) through 'No-mans-land' and enemy outposts in the night. Making preliminary survey ascertaining enemy strength and leading and directing the attacking force later in the night which captured the position at daylight and held it.

William also reports he was seriously wounded by gunshot in the right thigh two days later (on 7 April 1917).

William was awarded the Military Medal on 25 April 1917 and the award appeared in the *London Gazette* of 25 May 1917 #42493 and was promulgated in the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* on 11 October 1917, #174.

William's gunshot wound was initially treated by the 13th Field Ambulance, after which he was transferred to a Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) in the field. On 10 April he was admitted to 11th Stationary Hospital at Rouen, France with the severe gunshot wound (GSW) to his right thigh. On 14 April he was moved to the 9th CCS, also located in France. It was here that he received the notice of his Military Medal on 25 April.

On 30 April, William embarked on the HS *St George* at Rouen for England. He was admitted to the King George Hospital, London on 1 May (with a severe GSW to his right thigh noted).

William's family was notified of his injury and medical progress and one letter of 6 July 1917 to his father says he is 'progressing favourably'. On 7 July 1917 he was transferred to the 1st Australian Hospital at Harefield, England. The day before, he had been placed on a supernumerary pension as he had not returned to service for three months.

On 10 September 1917 William embarked in England on *HMAT A38 Ulysses* for his return to Australia.

He was discharged from the AIF in Brisbane on 29 January 1918.

A letter sent to William's mother and published in the Lismore *Northern Star* newspaper on 2 October 1917 ⁴ about William's service reads as follows:

Worthy of the D.C.M.

Sgt. Roy Thompson, writing from France on 24th June to Mrs Moses King, of Alstonville, regarding her wounded son, Sgt. W.W. King, says :-

'It is with mingled feelings of gladness and sorrow that I pen these few lines to you, sorrow for you because I know how a mother frets about her child when she is in a state of uncertainty as to its condition, and though the child may be a man yet the mother's love and feelings for him remain unchangeable; and gladness because of the fact that I have for a friend such a man as your son. Yes, you may be truly proud of your boy. I expect that you know that he has been awarded the Military Medal, but I can truthfully assure you that his actions and devotion to duty were well worthy of the D.C.M. That matters not, Mrs King; what counts here is the goodwill and trust of your comrades that has to be won, and my friend won it. I would have written to you earlier only I wanted to hear from Will first. I have had a letter from him and he has had a rather rough time, but is improving nicely. I really expect it will be some time before he is about again, but he is cheerful as ever, which is a great thing and helps wonderfully, so you can rest content and time and care will do the rest.'

Queensland Governor Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams presented William Washington King with his Military Medal in January 1918 and photographs of this presentation were published in the *Queenslander Pictorial* of 12 January, 1918.⁵ William was also awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.



On his return to Australia, William was cared for at the Kangaroo Point Hospital, Brisbane until he recovered sufficiently to return home.

Life after the war

William married Marjorie Rosetta Clarke at Byron Bay in 1929. No record can be found of any children to William and Marjorie.

Electoral Records of 1930 show William as working as a farmer at Opossum Green, and then in 1932 as an Assistant Stock Inspector.

A letter ⁶ was found in the National Archives dated 1 February 1943 and addressed to the Secretary, Base Records, AIF from William's brother James. James, who was living in Dorrigo, asks if they can supply him with the details about William's service and why he was awarded the Military Medal. James said the reason he would like to know is because William "will not be questioned on this matter and is reluctant to talk about his life as a soldier ..."

We cannot imagine the effect this war had on our soldiers and their lives after the war was over.

World War 2

It is possible that during WW2, William served at Myrtleford, Victoria at the 51st Australian Garrison Company Prisoner of War Camp as a Garrison Guard #V11708.

WW King, MM appears in a photograph from the Australian War Memorial #059300; this photograph, dated 6 November 1943, was taken at the Men's Mess at the 51st Australian Garrison Company Prisoner of War (POW) Camp. He is seen standing on the far left of the image and is described as "V11708, Private W. W. King, MM".

However, on checking the WW2 records for this service record (V11708) it appears it may be a William James King of Melbourne who enlisted with the Army Citizen Military Forces in Victoria; this uncertainty is yet to be resolved.



*Prisoner of War camp at Myrtleford, Victoria. Meal time.
WW King may be the soldier standing on the left.*

Australian War Memorial. 059300

Myrtleford is approximately 50 km from Wangaratta in Victoria. The Camp opened in late 1942 initially consisting of tents, but block huts were built seven months later. All the prisoners at the camp had been captured during the North African campaign and were Italian. The men typically arrived by boat into Sydney and then travelled by train to Gapsted Railway Station from where they marched into the Camp. More than 80% of the POWs were officers.

The Garrison Guard for the POW camp mostly consisted of WW1 Veterans, like William, or returned WW2 servicemen. The Camp closed in October 1946.⁷

Post WW2 and working life

William continued his occupation as Assistant Stock Inspector for a number of years, moving around the country. He and Marjorie are recorded in the Electoral Rolls as living at Bangalow, Copmanhurst⁸ and Glenreagh⁹ NSW.

An article in the *Daily Examiner* of 23 March 1954¹⁰ titled 'About People' records William Washington King of Copmanhurst being sworn in as a Justice of the Peace at Grafton. (Copmanhurst is some 27km north-west of Grafton.)

In the same year (1957) William, who was obviously a very community minded person, had his appointment as an Honorary Ranger and Honorary Fire Patrol Officer recorded in the Government Gazette of 1954.¹¹ He also appears again in another article in the *Daily Examiner* of Tuesday 26 October 1954¹² where he is described as the 'district apiary inspector of Copmanhurst'.

In 1963, 1968 and 1972 William was working as a Carpenter and living at Mountain View near Grafton.¹³

Passing

William Washington King passed away in 1974 aged 81 years. His wife, Marjorie, who passed away in 1998, survived him. They are both buried at the Clarence Lawn Cemetery, South Grafton.

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Researched and written by Miriam King, Brisbane. August 2018



Lest we forget