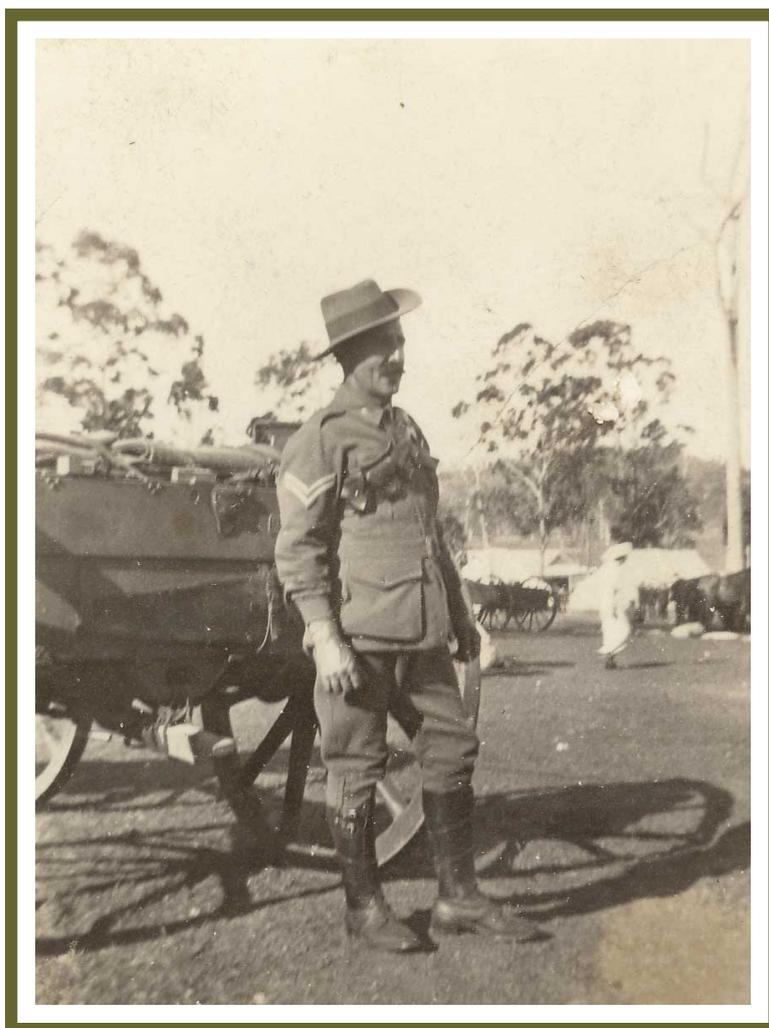


# Stories from the Honour Boards

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 173

# **ALBERT EDWARD RUNCORN 1879–1941**



This booklet remains the property of Saint Andrew's Uniting Church.  
Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.

**Cover illustration.** *Pompey Runcorn.*

*Possibly taken in 1914 at Enoggera Camp on his promotion to Corporal and shortly before embarking for Egypt.*

(Photo courtesy of the family)

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets  
Brisbane QLD 4000  
2017, 2020.

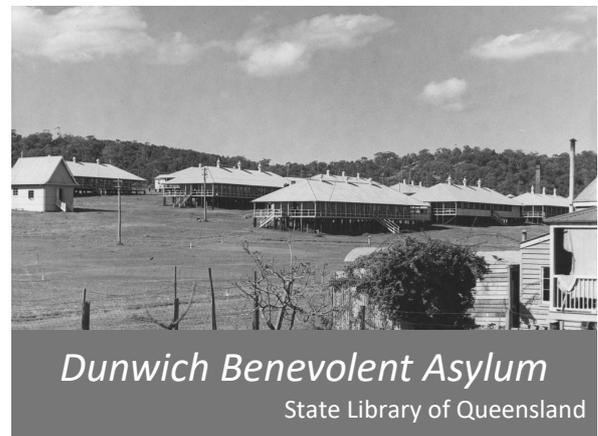
Go to <http://heritage.saintandrews.org.au/>  
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## **Warrant Officer Class 2 Albert Edward ('Pompey') Runcorn**

Albert Edward Runcorn served in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry in the Boer War, and in the 7<sup>th</sup> battery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Brigade at Gallipoli in World War 1, reaching the rank of Sergeant Major (also referred to as Warrant Officer Class 2).

He was born in Allora, Queensland and at different times in his life worked as a labourer, a blacksmith, an engine driver, an insurance claims clerk and manager, and a store manager.

At the age of 61 Albert was admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum in May 1941 because of ill health and died a few days later. He was buried in Toowong cemetery in Brisbane.



### **Family background**

Albert Edward Runcorn was born on 28 December 1879 and the Queensland births register gives the location as Allora, Queensland. Later records vary between giving his birthplace as Talgai or Allora, but there is only a short distance between these two places, so the variation seems insignificant.

His parents were John Runcorn, a ganger born in Shrewsbury, England and Liverpoolian Agnes née Taylor. After marrying in 1873 in Bradford, the couple migrated to Brisbane the following year. Agnes died in 1930 and John in 1942 (aged 89) – both were buried in the Toowong Cemetery with Congregational rites.

Albert's siblings included three sisters who appear in later membership lists for the Wharf Street Congregational Church— Florence, Ethel and Rhoda. Within the family he was thought of fondly, although not as conventional as them, and often referred to as 'Pompey'. Throughout his life he seems to have kept the closest contact with Rhoda, who married James Milne Southern. Southern was a nephew by marriage of James Clark - a prominent pearler and pastoralist included in the Australian Dictionary of Biography. Southern managed Clark's Brisbane interests for a period.

### **Boer war**

In 1900 Albert – then living in Susan Street, Fortitude Valley - enlisted as a Private in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry contingent (3<sup>rd</sup> QMI), and the group left for South Africa on the *Duke of Portland* at the start of March.

After arrival in Africa, the 3<sup>rd</sup> QMI was in active service from April 1900 to April 1901. They were among the forces that made an arduous march through Rhodesia to take part in the relief of the besieged town of Mafeking in May 1900 – an event enthusiastically greeted in Australia by the Electric Telegraph operators all standing up at 12.30pm and singing the National Anthem, and a public holiday being declared for Wednesday 23 May 1900.



*Albert Runcorn - 1900 -  
a Boer War Soldier*

That success was followed by a defeat in the Koster River Battle in July 1900, but then followed the successful defence of the Elands River Post in August and the Battle of Rhenoster Kop in November.

The following year the 3<sup>rd</sup> QMI took part in what was called the pursuit of De Wet in Cape Colony, with various clashes with the rearguard of De Wet's forces and the capture of many Boers and wagons. De Wet and his remaining forces, however, escaped into Orange Free State.

Next the 3<sup>rd</sup> QMI returned to the Transvaal and participated in an advance on Pietersburg, (now called Polokwane) which was taken with little resistance.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> QMI embarked for Australia on 9 May 1901 on the *Morayshire*, disembarking in Sydney on 7 June and completing the return to Brisbane by train. The unit was formally disbanded on 21 June 1901.

### **Back to civilian life**

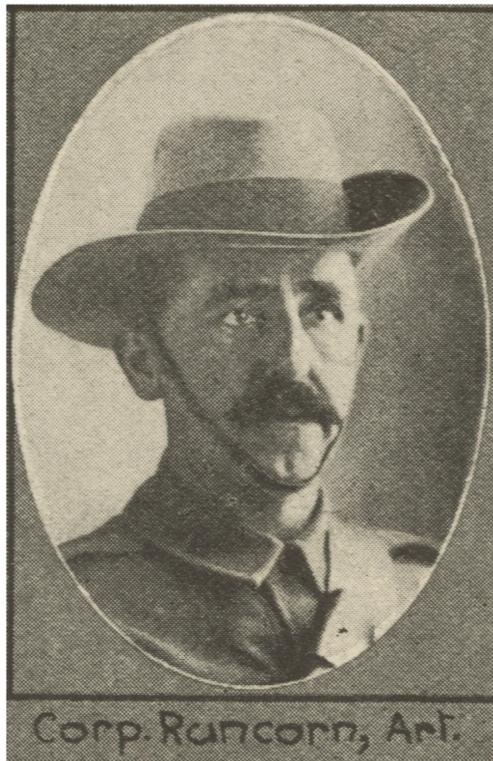
On his return, Albert worked as a blacksmith for a period and lived in the family home in Gipps Street, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane. However, when he married in 1907 – to Brisbane-born Annie Victoria Roch in St Stephen's Cathedral with Roman Catholic rites - his occupation was recorded as labourer. Annie's father Louis was also a labourer and her mother was Bridget née Casey.

The electoral rolls for 1908 and 1909 list Albert as a labourer, but by 1912 he and Annie were living at Myora (near Dunwich on North Stradbroke Island) and Albert was working as an oysterman.

## World War 1 service

Albert enlisted in the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF on 18 August 1914, soon after enlistments began, at the age of 33. By then he and Annie were living in Victoria Street in the Brisbane suburb of Spring Hill, and his enlistment papers record 'skipper' as his occupation.

He was 169cms tall, weighed 73kg, had a dark complexion, brown eyes and black hair, and gave his religion as Church of England. Initially appointed a bombardier in the 7<sup>th</sup> battery of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Brigade, Albert was soon promoted to Corporal on 13 September.



The 7<sup>th</sup> battery embarked on HMAT *Rangatira* A22 in Brisbane on 25 September 1914 to join up with the first AIF convoy to Egypt. For the purposes of the journey Albert was made a Sergeant, and although he reverted to Corporal soon after arrival in Egypt in December 1914, he was promoted to Sergeant in January 1915.



*Members of the 2nd Australian Light Horse Regiment  
and 7th Battery, Australian Field Artillery  
embarking HMT Rangatira at Pinkenba Wharf.  
The Rangatira was part of the convoy  
carrying the first contingent to Egypt.*

*Australian War Memorial P01235.006*

The Anzacs landed at a location on the Gallipoli Peninsula on 25 April 1915 in which it was particularly difficult for the 18 pounder guns of the Australian artillery units to operate. Apart from the physical challenge of moving the guns up the steep terrain, 18 pounders fire at a relatively flat trajectory (unlike howitzers), and to have any effectiveness in reaching the narrow gullies and trenches occupied by the enemy, meant using relatively exposed placements for the guns. Moreover, in many places there was little distance between opposing trenches.



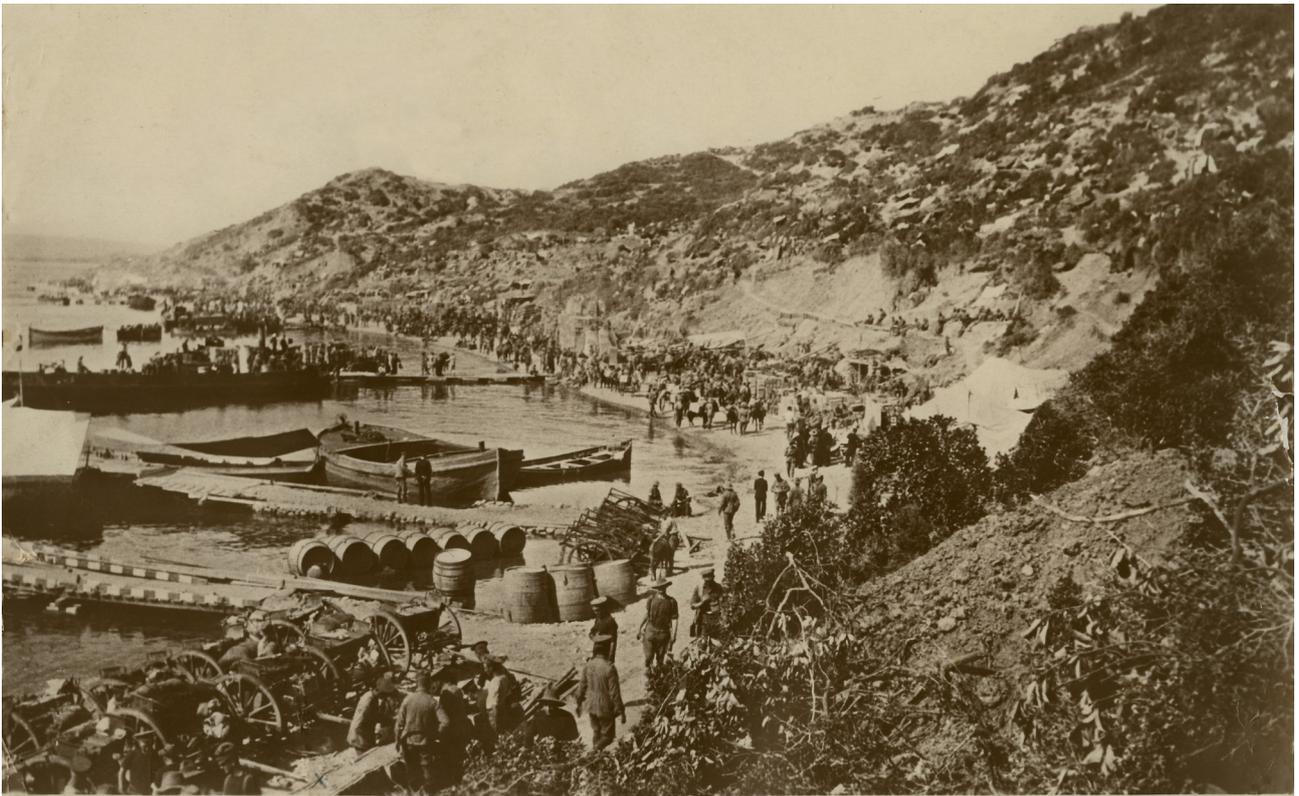
*Gallipoli, 26 April, 1915. Members of the 7th Battery, 3rd Field Artillery Brigade Headquarters, being towed ashore in Anzac Cove with their artillery.*

Australian War Memorial P01722.004

In his history of the Australian artillery, David Horner noted how the 7<sup>th</sup> battery adapted to play an important role in one type of situation:

On the right the 7<sup>th</sup> Battery ... was within a few metres of the front line, and on the nights of 26 and 27 April its guns played a key role in repulsing determined Turkish attacks. One of the guns fired across an open field with its shrapnel rounds timed to burst at the gun muzzle like a gigantic shotgun. The Turks attacked again in the morning of 27 April and some were killed only 25 metres from the muzzle of this gun.

The Gallipoli campaign became a stalemate, with the Anzacs confined to a relatively small area, despite some gains in the major August offensive, and the conditions began to add to casualty numbers in a major way. Continuous hardship, fatigue and poor diet weakened the longer serving Anzacs, making them easy prey for illness and disease.



ANZAC COVE, GALLIPOLI.

*A photo postcard sent by Pompey Runcorn to his wife in March 1916.*

*Our Gun Limbers just above x this is also where we landed  
on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1915. There was no jetty on that date.  
With fondest love to my dearest wife  
in memory of 7 months of misery.  
Sent from Weymouth England  
10 " 3 " 16*

*Writing on the back of the Gallipoli postcard.*

*(Photo courtesy of the family)*

Albert was promoted Sergeant Major for the 7<sup>th</sup> battery on 1 September 1915 and his health held up until November, when he was evacuated among the sick and wounded and treated at the Royal Victoria Hospital in England for ‘valvular disease of the heart’. After discharge from hospital in January 1916, Albert embarked on HMAT *Ascanius* A11 in Portland in March 1916 for Australia, and on arrival was formally discharged on 16 May 1916.

That wasn’t the complete end of his contribution – he was active in assisting recruitment activities in Queensland for the rest of the War, and in at least 1918 was on the executive of the Queensland Returned Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Imperial League.



*Inaugurating an Anzac Cottage.  
Mr H Coyne (Minister for Railways) caps the first stump  
of the new cottage at Wynnum.*

*The Brisbane Courier.* Monday 10 September 1917



*Committee of the Anzac workers with the Minister for Railways and Sargeant (sic) Runcorn at the stump capping ceremony at Wynnum on Sunday.*

*The Brisbane Courier. Monday 10 September 1917*

## **Civilian life**

Back in civilian life Albert worked as an engine driver, and lived with Annie in Oriel Road, Ascot. At some time between 1919 and 1925 Albert became a clerk working in the claims area of the Ocean Accident and Guarantee Corporation. By 1927 he was head of the claims area and between at least 1925 and 1929 he and Annie resided in Kent Street, Hamilton.

Albert was still employed with Ocean Accident and Guarantee Corporation in 1929, but by 1932 was a store manager at Mt Edwards near Boonah.

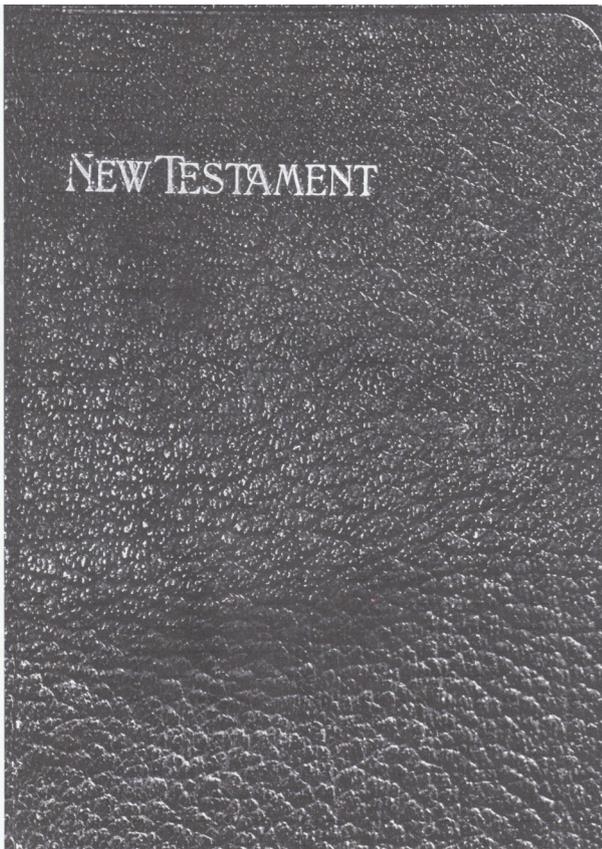
In 1934 the couple were back in Ascot in Brisbane – without any occupation listed for Albert - and then in 1937 they were in Apollo Road, Bulimba with clerk being specified as Albert's occupation.

In 1937 Annie passed away, and the following year Albert married German-born Pauline Ernestine Meta Hamann in the Nazareth Lutheran Church, South Brisbane according to the rites of the United Evangelical Church. Both gave their occupation as clerk.

Albert was admitted to the Benevolent Asylum at Dunwich on North Stradbroke Island because of ill health on 1 May 1941, and died eight days later, aged 61, of myocarditis. He had no money and no property – his AMP life insurance policy was assigned to his sister Rhoda Southern in April 1941 and 33 pounds, 16 shillings was paid out to her on his death.

On the application of his widow, Pauline, the Repatriation Commission paid his funeral expenses of 15 pounds.

Albert was buried with Congregational forms in the Toowong cemetery (Portion 10, section 81, grave no.20) on 12 May 1941.



9<sup>th</sup> Oct 1914

To Dear Albert

Trusting that this Book will  
prove a great comfort and  
blessing to him during his  
travels

With love  
from Winnie & Jack

John 3: 16.

Through the Great War  
1914 to 1918

with 1612 Pte Major Runcorn  
7<sup>th</sup> Battery 3<sup>rd</sup> A.I.F.

The New Testament Albert Runcorn carried throughout his army service. He was one of many in the 1st AIF who carried Bibles or other religious items in their personal effects.

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Information from Jill Brown, a family member, is gratefully acknowledged.

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Written by Ian Carnell AM

March 2017

Revised August 2020





*Lest we forget*