

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 220

ALBERT SHIELDS

1886 - 1962



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Private Albert Shields

Albert Shields was nearly 30 years old when he joined the Australian Military Forces in Brisbane on 22 July 1916. Little is known about his background or family ties before then. The answers he gave to the questions on the attestation paper provide some idea of his earlier life. Albert was born in Edinburgh, Scotland. His father, also named Albert Shields, was next-of-kin, living at 5 Randle Road, London. However, his father's name and address were replaced on his attestation paper by his sister's name, Mrs Singlehurst of 185 North Woolwich Road, Silvertown – a district forming part of the Port of London beside the River Thames. The change was authorised in February 1917. Perhaps his father died or for some other reason, could no longer accept responsibility as next-of-kin. It would appear Albert was without relatives in Australia.

Albert Shields arrived in Sydney from London on 30 August 1915, having been engaged as a trimmer on the ship *Port Albany*. It is not known why he moved to Brisbane or if he found employment there. He said his occupation was "labourer". He stood 5 feet 5 inches tall (165cm) and had a dark complexion and brown hair; tattoos on both forearms were distinctive marks and he needed dental treatment. His religious denomination was Church of England. With Regimental Number 2740, Private Albert Shields was appointed to the 52nd Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and commenced training at Rifle Range Paddock, Enoggera Camp in North Brisbane. Perhaps Albert Shields met Padre Ernest Merrington who frequently attended parades and services at Enoggera Camp while minister at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. If so, this might explain why his name is on one of the honour boards at St Andrew's Uniting Church in Brisbane. The honour board that bears Albert's name was unveiled by Captain Colonel Merrington on Sunday 10 September 1916.¹

Reinforcements were urgently needed at the Western Front. By the beginning of October 1916, just a few weeks after enlistment, Private Shields was embarking from Sydney on board HMAT² *Ceramic* bound for Plymouth, England, arriving on 21 November.

1. *The Brisbane Courier*, 12 September 1916, page 4

2. His Majesty's Australian Transport

After another brief period of training, the troops proceeded overseas to France on board SS¹ *Invicta* from Folkstone to Étaples to join the 47th Battalion there. At this time, the 47th was transferring to the Western Front where it was to fight in the trenches for the next two and a half years but on 8 June 1917, less than 12 months since his enlistment in Brisbane, Albert Shields was wounded in action. He was treated first at No 2 Australian Casualty Clearing Station at Trois Arbres near Bailleul for gunshot wounds on his feet and right hand.

Albert Shields was one of many, many wounded soldiers. In May and June 1917, nursing sisters at No 2 CCS were reporting on the heavy demands being placed upon them, requiring an increase of nursing staff to 14. The Sister-in-charge wrote that they had three operating tables in use throughout the day and usually two at night. In two months in 1917 almost 2000 operations were performed in this unit alone. Many patients were received from mustard attacks. "Mustard oil shells are being used by the enemy," wrote the Sister-in-charge, "in consequence of which we receive many patients with burns therefrom, the eyes specially being much inflamed. At times, large blisters form on the body."²

Such was the severity of his wounds, Private Shields was transferred to 8th Stationary Hospital, Wimereux in France for a few days before being transferred again to County of Middlesex War Hospital, Napsbury in England for necessary treatment on his hand and feet.



WARD F 5
The County of Middlesex War Hospital, Napsbury.

<http://ezitis.myzen.co.uk/>

1. Steam Ship
2. *The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War 1914-1918*, Vol II, page 382

Albert was discharged from hospital on 31 July, granted furlough and instructed to report to No 2 Command Depot in Weymouth on 14 August. By failing to do so however, Private Shields committed a crime for which he received punishment in the form of an "award". He was awarded confinement to barracks for seven days and forfeited five days' pay for overstaying furlough by four days.

Based at Monte Video Australian Camp at Weymouth, Albert committed two more offences and received similar punishments. Both were for absences without leave. Following his absence in November 1917, Albert forfeited a total of eleven days' pay. But Albert's problems were more than misdemeanours requiring disciplinary action. His serious physical and mental condition must have been recognised because preparations were soon made for him to be invalided home. Shell shock was a term commonly used in those days. It was a reaction to the intensity of the bombardment and fighting that produced a helplessness appearing variously as panic, running away, inability to reason, sleep, walk or talk.

On 31 January 1918, Albert Shields left England for return to Australia per hospital transport *Argyllshire*. He re-embarked at Cape Town, continuing the voyage per HMAT *Osterley* and disembarked at Sydney for return to Brisbane where he was discharged as medically unfit on 23 May 1918. His disability was described as "dilated action of heart".

Sad to say, Albert Shields like thousands of other veterans suffered the physical and mental effects of the terrible and destructive war. It is fortunate the Australian Government set up the Repatriation Department to help returned veterans resettle in the Australian community. "Repat" as it was called was being considered for Albert in May 1922. He obtained work as a labourer in the Queensland towns of Roma in 1919 and Childers in 1925. He was residing alone in Newstead in 1928, Spring Hill in 1931 and finally in the suburb of New Farm from about 1943.

The sad and lonely life of Albert Shields ended on 18th February 1962. His death certificate shows his name and date of death but the names of his father and mother are not recorded. No-one knew.

The name of A Shields is engraved on an honour board in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Chapel at St Andrew's Uniting Church. Albert Shields is also honoured in the Queensland Garden of Remembrance at Bridgeman Downs in North Brisbane along with other veterans.
"Their name liveth for evermore."¹

1. Ecclesiasticus 44:14



References

Ancestry on line

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The Brisbane Courier, Tuesday 12 September 1916, page 4

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Lest we forget