

## 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 86

# **ERIC EDWARD SOLLEY**

**1895 - 1964**



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

**Cover:**

*A family photograph of Eric Solley taken in the early 1950s*

.

©Saint Andrew's Uniting Church  
Corner Ann and Creek Streets  
Brisbane QLD 4000  
2016

## Warrant Officer Eric Edward Solley

Eric Edward Solley was born in Toowoomba on 3 September 1895, the second son of William, a grocer, and Emma née Martin. Eric had two brothers - the older named William, the younger named Owen. The family worshipped at Saint Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Toowoomba and Eric's father was involved in church groups, South Boys' State School committee and lodges in the city. Eric attended Toowoomba Grammar School and in 1910 passed English, German, Latin, Arithmetic and Organic Chemistry in the Junior Public Examination conducted in those days by the University of Sydney. On leaving school, Eric gained employment in the Toowoomba office of the AMP Society<sup>1</sup> and trained in the senior cadets gaining non-commissioned rank in the Citizen Forces and the Toowoomba Rifle Club.

He was only 19 years 7 months old when he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 30 March 1915 to serve overseas in the Great War. At a farewell function in his honour at the AMP Society office, the Manager and other senior officers made speeches and presented him with a wristlet watch. A farewell social was also arranged by the Saint Stephen's Sunday School teachers when a gold-mounted fountain pen was given to him. Six feet (183 cm) in height, Eric Solley was a popular and well-known young man, even attracting comment in a Brisbane newspaper, "Eric Solley is another of the large batch of Toowoombaites seized with the desire to have a hand in the routing of Barmy Bill of Berlin. Eric who is on the staff of the A.M.P. at Toowoomba has been accepted at Enoggera." <sup>2</sup>

---

1. Australian Mutual Provident Society

2. *The Truth*, 11 April 1915, page 4

He was appointed to the 4<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Field Ambulance at Enoggera Camp on 2 June 1915, given regimental number 2613 and rank of corporal wagon orderly. Corporal Solley's unit embarked from Brisbane on His Majesty's Australian Transport *Borda* on 16 June 1915.

While camped in Egypt, Private Cochrane<sup>1</sup> sent news to home, "I am thankful to say I am back in the old Toowoomba tent once more, amongst my old chums." He wrote on behalf of TGS old boys, mentioning in particular Eric Solley who had received a school magazine containing a list of all the old boys who had enlisted. Some of them were together at Tel-el-Kebir. "The Egyptian climate seems to be alright. The heat is nothing out of the ordinary although we would feel it a bit if we had to drill in the heat of the day. We rise at 4.30 am, drill from 5.30 am till 8.20, then breakfast then off duty till 4.30 pm and drill from 4.30 till 6.30 pm. We are waiting anxiously for our new uniforms, khaki shirt, short khaki trousers and puttees and a helmet."

Eric Solley's military service record notes he spent a short time in hospital with influenza at Heliopolis in mid-September 1915. He kept five small diaries relating to his AIF service in World War 1. Most of the entries were written in pencil and were quite difficult to decipher after so many years but his son Keith Solley transcribed the diaries in 1975. His service in Egypt with the 4<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Field Ambulance was short. On 18 April 1916, Eric Solley noted in his diary, "Received word of vacancy in Divisional H.Q. staff" and on 19 April he wrote, "Had a typewriting test and was selected (2 competing). Started mid-day in 5<sup>th</sup> Aust. Divisional Headquarters".

---

1. Pte Cochrane (TGS old boy) to friends in Toowoomba in letter dated 30 July 1915

He was later posted to France arriving in Marseilles on 23 June 1916. While serving in France, he was promoted to sergeant in July 1916, to staff sergeant the following December and to temporary warrant officer class 1 in April 1917. He then served as the Chief Clerk at 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Divisional Headquarters for 18 months when he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal.



The citation read, “For meritorious service and devotion to duty. This N.C.O. has been with 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Divisional headquarters for 18 months and has carried out his responsible duties as Chief Clerk in a painstaking and thorough manner. He has shown marked ability and powers of organisation and his work has been of exceptional value.”<sup>1</sup>

Eric Solley noted in his diary on 23 January 1918 that he was presented with his MSM ribbon by General Sir W R Birdwood. News of this honour was sent by letter to Eric’s mother at her home in Herries Street, Toowoomba. The letter referred to the publication of her son’s award in the London Gazette dated 28 December 1917 saying that Regimental Sergeant-Major EE Solley was awarded a meritorious service medal, “in recognition of valuable service rendered with the armies in the field during the present war”. How proud she would have been to read of her son’s conspicuous services as a member of the Australian Imperial Force! At her son’s request the medal was sent to her “for safe keeping against the time of his return.” Major McLean added, “and I trust he will be spared to wear it for many years to come.”

---

1. *Commonwealth Gazette* No 57, 18 April 1918

Mrs Emma Solley acknowledged the receipt for the consignment from the Defence Department of one meritorious service medal as requested, adding beside her signature, "with many thanks".

Warrant Officer Eric Solley was transferred to Australian Corps Headquarters in France after the Armistice in 1918. On 14 December 1918 he wrote in his diary, "I am at present working with General Staff Clerks to learn the job." He also mentioned his accommodation "in a large and beautifully furnished chateau" and a visit to Headquarters by the Prince of Wales. He moved to Sutton Veny and Folkstone in England in April 1919 in preparation for his return to Australia per troopship *Bremen* on 5 June 1919. His diary noted the departure had been postponed twice. Other medals awarded to him were the 1914/15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Eric Solley returned to his Herries Street home in Toowoomba where his parents still lived and resumed his career in the AMP Society as an assurance clerk. On 23 April 1921 at Saint Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Sydney he married Jessie Louise Thomson, fourth daughter of Mr and Mrs John Thomson of Chatswood. Rev Alex Clark officiated. The couple returned to Queensland and settled at Garthleigh in Bowley Street, Clayfield which was to be their home for the rest of their lives. Their children were Keith Eric and Margaret. Mrs Jessie Solley died on 8 February 1962 and Eric Edward Solley died on 31 January 1964, aged 68 years. He is honoured on one of the Rolls of Honour in the old hall at Toowoomba Grammar School and on one of the honour boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Church in Brisbane.

## References

National Archives of Australia, World War 1 military records

Australian War Memorial

embarkation rolls

honours and awards

unit histories

*Darling Downs Gazette*, 7 Feb 1914, page 6; 1 April 1915, page 4;  
7 Sept 1915, page 5

*Daily Standard*, 6 May 1915, page 6

*Truth*, Brisbane, 11 April 1915, page 4

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 April, 1921

*The Toowoomba Chronicle*, 5 August 1915

Compiled by Noel E Adsett who acknowledges the kind assistance of WO Solley's granddaughter Ailsa Solley who lives in Canberra.

Brisbane

March 2016



*Lest we forget*