

## THIS BAND OF BROTHERS

By Allan Tonks

altonks60@gmail.com

### The men of No. 15 Section



*On the reverse of this postcard sent home by George Rigby, he writes:*

#### ***This is No. 15 Section, "My Boys"***

*Back row [L to R]: Private Jamieson, Avery, Howell, Fox F, Atherton, Fox N, Stuart  
Sitting: Private Gunderson, Geo. Harris, Corporal GHR [George Rigby], Sherman, Mahaffey  
Front: Private Fisher*

Corporal **George Rigby** sent home this photographic postcard which shows the men who were in his No. 15 Section while they were at Mena Camp in Egypt in early 1915. The Australian Army had restructured while the AIF was camped in Egypt, so that the number of companies within each battalion was reduced from eight to four. These changes necessitated many internal transfers, and as a result George's group of men became part of A Company. Each of the 9th Battalion's four companies now contained 227 men of all ranks, with four platoons to each company, and with four sections contained within each platoon. Each section contained a corporal in charge of 12 men.

It was the A and B Companies of the 9th Battalion that landed with the first wave of

troops at Gallipoli, with C and D Companies following soon after with the second wave.

Four of these men had been close friends before the war. Fred and Norman Fox had travelled from the family property "Carfax" to enlist together in Rockhampton. Fred had previously boarded with the Atherton family while at school in Rockhampton, and he was also a good friend of Peter Stuart.

Six of these men, including George Rigby, were to be wounded on the first day at Gallipoli, and one of them, Godfrey Sherman, was to be killed on that first day.

Another four of them were to be killed during the war, and at least eight of them spent significant time in hospitals suffering from serious illness. Their collective experience helps us to better appreciate the real

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hardships suffered by the early ANZAC volunteers.

The men in No. 15 Section of the 9th Battalion were as follows:

**WILLIAM JAMIESON**, Regimental number 337.



William Jamieson was from New South Wales but was living in Broomfield Street at Taringa in Brisbane, and was aged just 19 when he enlisted. He was wounded on the first day at Gallipoli, suffering a gunshot wound to his right leg, and he was

subsequently evacuated to hospital in Malta. He recovered from this wound and rejoined his unit at Gallipoli in July. In October he became seriously sick with diarrhoea and was again evacuated from Gallipoli to hospital. He was wounded at least four times during the war, which included a bomb wound to his arm and neck and a severe shrapnel wound to his left leg, and he was promoted to the rank of sergeant in October 1917. Jamieson was killed in Belgium by enemy machine gun fire on 24 April 1918, on the same day that Oliffe Gunderson was charged with drunkenness. His belongings were collected and packed by his former section mate, Lieutenant A.G. Avery, but these were somehow lost in transit and by 1919 the family had received nothing more than a pocket Kodak camera that had belonged to him. William Jamieson was buried at the Meteren Military Cemetery, alongside four other 9th Battalion soldiers who were killed on the same day.

**ALLAN GORDON AVERY**, Regimental number 338.

Allan Avery became seriously sick from sunstroke in August 1915 while at Gallipoli, and then received a gunshot wound to the thigh later that month. He also suffered from dysentery and mumps, and later in 1918 he



contracted influenza. He had received a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 9th Battalion during 1917. In August 1918 he was again wounded, suffering injuries to his face, nose, left hand and right elbow. He

survived the war and was taking courses at the London Day Training School after the armistice, prior to returning to Australia in October 1919.

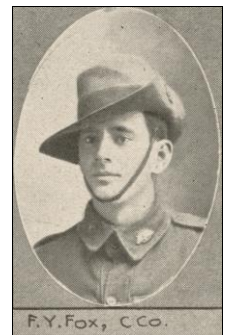
**DOUGLAS HOWELL**, Regimental number 351.



Douglas Howell became sick with dysentery in October 1915, and as a result he was evacuated from the peninsula, taking four months to recover from the illness. He was also wounded at least twice during the war, suffering a gunshot

wound to his thigh in May 1916 and a gunshot wound to the chest in June 1916. He was promoted to the rank of corporal in October 1917. Douglas Howell survived the First World War and later enlisted with the 25th Infantry Battalion during WWII, serving in PNG from July 1942 [Q22772].

**FREDERICK YOUNG FOX**, Regimental number 389.



**THIS BAND OF BROTHERS (Cont.)**

Frederick Fox was one of two brothers from Rockhampton in Queensland who were in No. 15 Section, and he was in the very first boat to land at Gallipoli. He later became very sick and was evacuated in August 1915 to hospitals in Egypt, where he slowly recovered. He then received a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant and was posted to the 49th Battalion, rising to the rank of Captain in October 1917. He was wounded in action on 25 April 1918, exactly three years after the Gallipoli landings, suffering an injury to his left leg. Frederick Fox survived the war and later married. He died in 1964.

**JOHN (JACK) MOTLEY ATHERTON**, Regimental number 377.



Jack Atherton was wounded in his left arm in May 1915 and was evacuated from Gallipoli to hospital in Malta. Following on from this he became seriously ill with typhoid, during which he was "*in bed 2 months*". He was to be repatriated to Australia but instead

was discharged in England, whereupon he immediately enlisted with the Royal Flying Corps as a Lieutenant. He was later injured in what appears to have been a flight training accident and spent many months recovering. He was finally posted to 85 Squadron and was receiving training on "*Handley Page machines*" when the war ended.

Jack Atherton worked as a chemist after the war. He later took a position with the Administration Pharmacy Bureau at Rabaul, and was captured at Kokopo when Japanese forces invaded in January 1942 (his wife and children had fortunately been evacuated earlier). He was one of the civilian internees who were on board the Japanese transport, the *Montevideo Maru*, when it was torpedoed by Allied forces. All the Allied prisoners and internees on board, including Jack Atherton, subsequently died.

**NORMAN LAMBERT FOX**, Regimental number 390.



Norman Fox was an older brother to Frederick Fox and was aged 24 when he enlisted. He became seriously ill with diarrhoea while at Gallipoli and was evacuated in September to hospitals in Egypt. After he had

recovered from his illness he was promoted to Corporal. While training in February 1916 at a School of Instruction at Zeitoun he was mortally wounded in a bombing accident. He died from abdominal wounds later that same day and was buried in the British Military Cemetery in Cairo.



*Norman Fox's grave at the British Military Cemetery in Cairo is in a central position, with a large cross headstone.*

This photograph of his grave, from the Australian War Memorial, was supplied by George Fox.

**PETER FITZALAN MACDONALD STUART**, Regimental number 378.

Peter Stuart was wounded on the first day of the landings at Gallipoli, and was later sent to hospital a second time suffering from jaundice. In January 1916 he was again admitted to hospital, this time with mumps. He was commissioned as a Lieutenant early in 1916 and was transferred to the 49th Battalion. On 4 September 1916 Stuart was shot in the head and killed by a German



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sniper while leading a bombing attack at Mouquet Farm near Pozieres in France. Peter Stuart kept a personal diary of his war service, which is now in the John Oxley Library. In his entry for Monday 26 July 1915, he writes: *"Census affair taking of the old 9th Bn that*

*landed 1200 strong now there are only 150... poor old ninth ... No. 15 Section No. 4 Platoon luckiest section in the battalion..."*

**OLIFFE GUNDERSON**, Regimental number 359.



Oliffe Gunderson was 35 when he enlisted and he was easily the oldest man in No. 15 Section. He was a book keeper by occupation and had lived at West End in Brisbane. Gunderson was never wounded nor seriously ill during WWI. It is likely that, because of his age and work skills, he was put in

charge of supply duties while at Gallipoli. After the evacuation from the Peninsula, he was transferred to the Army Ordnance Corps and was quickly promoted to Sergeant. In September 1916 he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal *"in recognition of valuable services rendered during the present war"*. On the afternoon of 24 April 1918 - exactly three years to the day since the 9th Battalion men boarded HMS *Queen* bound for the landings at Gallipoli - he was charged with being drunk while on duty. Six pages of his court martial proceedings are contained within his service files at the *Discovering Anzacs* website, which show that supporting witnesses all agreed on his general reliability and conscientious work ethic. He was nonetheless found guilty and was thereby

temporarily reduced in rank. Oliffe Gunderson survived the war and returned to Australia in May 1919.

**GEORGE HARRIS**, Regimental number 297.



George Harris, like George Rigby, suffered serious gunshot wounds on the first day of the Gallipoli landings. He received wounds to his left arm and to his left leg and thigh. He was subsequently evacuated to hospital but remained

*"dangerously ill"* for a lengthy period of time. Finally, in August 1915, his left leg was amputated. He was invalided back to Australia, and arrived home a few months before Rigby. George Harris died in 1965.

**CORPORAL GEORGE HENRY RIGBY**, Regimental number 294.



George Rigby was one of two brothers who enlisted with the 9th Battalion and sailed for war aboard the HMAT *A5 Omrah*. His older brother, Lieutenant William John 'Jack' Rigby of B Company,

was killed in the fighting at Baby 700 on the first day of the landings at Gallipoli. Sergeant Fred Coe, in a letter he wrote later from his hospital bed, states: *"Lieutenant Rigby got a bullet ... and shrapnel completed his short career as a soldier ... a very short one, but he died, another good example to all, in the very first line of fire, where he had been all day ... Of our original 70, under Major Robertson, I think only 6 are left."* [Coe's original letter appeared on page 7 of the *Brisbane Courier* on 18 August 1915].

George Rigby was wounded in the afternoon of that first day of the landings, when a bullet struck his left leg below the knee. He was

## THIS BAND OF BROTHERS (Cont.)

evacuated and was finally admitted to a military hospital in Cairo four days later. He never sufficiently recovered, and late in 1916 he was returned to Australia. George was assessed as being medically unfit for further service and was discharged from the Army in December 1916. George Rigby then returned to his clerical job at Wills, Gilchrist & Sanderson Ltd. in Wharf Street, Brisbane. He married, and he later worked as a forestry officer on the Atherton Tablelands for several years. George Rigby died in Brisbane on 9 September 1973.

**GODFREY JOHN SHERMAN,**  
Regimental number 206.



Godfrey Sherman's file shows that he was originally posted to B Company before he was assigned to No. 15 Section in A Company, while the other men were all originally in C Company.

Godfrey was initially posted as missing, but the finding of a later Court of Inquiry was that he had been killed on the first day of the Gallipoli landings. By June 1921 his father, W. Sherman, had met with the returned soldier Sergeant Webb, and wrote the following to the Base Records Office: *'Sergeant Webb of the 9th Battalion claims to have witnessed my son's death. Sergeant Webb says that it was a shell which terminated my son's life, and that practically no traces were left, nor was any opportunity then offered for burial...'*

It had been a long period of anguish for the Sherman family in trying to find out what had happened to their son, which was made worse when his personal effects were sent instead to a woman in Sydney, who Godfrey had nominated as next-of-kin.

To make matters even worse for the family, Godfrey's brother **Leslie Sherman** was also killed in action, at Zonnebeke in Belgium, in 1917.

**HENRY MAHAFFEY**, Regimental number 361.



Henry Mahaffey was from Boonah in Queensland and was 25 years old when he enlisted in C Company of the 9th Battalion. His service file indicates that he was transferred to A Company on 30 January 1915. Mahaffey was wounded on the first day at Gallipoli with a bullet wound to his left

arm. While with the unit he worked mostly as a stretcher bearer. In October 1915 he was wounded a second time when shrapnel struck his hand, and after the evacuation of Gallipoli he was promoted to Lance Corporal. He was wounded again in August 1916 in France with a gunshot wound to his left eye, and was later killed in action on 20 November 1916. He was subsequently awarded the Military Medal for his efforts in August, with the citation being as follows:

*At Pozieres, France, 18/2nd August 1916, L/Cpl MAHAFFEY was in charge of a squad of stretcher bearers, he was repeatedly conspicuous for his bravery and devotion to duty. In spite of the fact that early in the operations he lost two of his squad he carried on his work with little assistance and in a most capable manner. Men were repeatedly buried in the front-line trenches when L/Cpl MAHAFFEY dug them out and rendered most timely and valuable first aid in their resuscitation. He repeatedly carried wounded men to the aid post over open country and under close enemy observation during which time the enemy kept up a persistent barrage of heavy artillery fire. On the last day L/Cpl MAHAFFEY was badly wounded in the eye but would not leave his duty until the other wounded had been cleared. Lance Corporal MAHAFFEY was also conspicuous during the attack on*

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*Pozieres on July 23rd... his work has always been most praiseworthy.*

Henry Mahaffey's brother, Corporal A. Mahaffey of the 25th Battalion, was also killed in action during the war.

**WILLIAM ARTHUR (ANDY) FISHER,**  
Regimental number 362.



William 'Andy' Fisher was with Fred Fox in the first boat to land at Gallipoli, according to a list displayed at the 9th Battalion's War Memorial Museum at Enoggera. He suffered wounds to one arm and to his

legs on the first day of the campaign and was evacuated to hospital. He later came down with a serious bout of typhoid and was repatriated home to Brisbane in Australia. He was discharged as being medically unfit for further service in March 1916.

Andy Fisher became a prominent activist for the rights of returned servicemen in the years following the war. He was an early member of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League, holding positions as Honorary Treasurer and State Secretary. In 1921 he was elected to the Brisbane City Council as an alderman for South Brisbane.

### **Acknowledgements**

Information about the above soldiers was initially sourced from their service files via the '**Discovering Anzacs**' webpage.

The author sincerely thanks Noelene Blatch and her family for allowing their photographic postcard of the No. 15 Section men at Mena Camp in Cairo to be used in this article. Noelene is a granddaughter of George Rigby.

Thanks also go to George Fox and family for the use of the photographic postcard of the men at Frasers Paddock at Enoggera, and for supplying additional information and photographs for this story.

Thanks also go to Peter Burgess, author of *The First Ashore: The Stories of our First Anzacs* for information about Private William Arthur Fisher and Private Frederick Young Fox, who were both in the first boat to land at Gallipoli.

The full story of the Rigby family during WWI can be freely downloaded from an excellent website about Yeronga Memorial Park, created by **Dr Richard Walding** which can be accessed at <https://indicatorloops.com/yeronga/>. This website presents extensive obituaries for 97 local soldiers who perished during WWI; the Rigby articles can be found on page 174 at the end of the obituary for **William John 'Jack' Rigby**.

The Rigby family story first featured in a chapter titled '*The Rigby family during the First World War*' in *Stephens and War: A history of Annerley and surrounding suburbs during war times* compiled by Stephen W Sheaffe AM and published by Annerley Stephens History Group Inc. in 2020.

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Noelene Blatch and George Fox). ■

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