

HARRY ANDERSON'S STORY

This is a short account of the life and military service of my grandfather, William Henry Anderson, known as Harry, who served in the First World War and spent some time at the various military camps around the Salisbury Plain area and at Weymouth, England. It shows the eagerness of a young man from an impoverished background to serve the Mother Country, while suddenly discovering the possibility of improving his education and career prospects.

Harry was born on 14 August 1892 at Pranjip, a place that only exists now as the name of a creek near the town of Longwood, Victoria, on the old Hume Highway between Melbourne and Sydney. His parents, Thomas and Helena Anderson, had a sheep farm there. Harry was their first child, and he had two younger brothers, Tommy and Hartley, also born at Pranjip. Then, as the farm was not prospering during the economic depression in Australia in the 1890s, the family travelled by ship to Western Australia in 1897. Great quantities of gold had recently been discovered in that colony. The Andersons arrived at the town of Bunbury, as Fremantle Harbour had not yet been completed.

The family spent a few months at Boyanup, near Bunbury, on a farm growing peas and tomatoes, then in 1898 went to Mount Magnet just after the railway line there was completed. This was a goldfield 500 kilometres north-east of Perth. Initially they established a boarding house on the Eclipse Mine then Thomas opened his own mine, the Hesperus Dawn. This was a very rich mine, but it led to seven years of tragedy and legal frustration, with most of the gold ending up in lawyers' pockets. Three more sons were born: Gordon in 1899 and twins George and Edward (Eddie) in 1904 – a total of six boys altogether.

Harry, the oldest Anderson boy, had to walk six kilometres to and from school in Mount Magnet. He decided this was too much and left at the age of 14 to work in the Post Office. The long rides delivering mail did not appeal to him either so he went to work at the Jupiter Mine. This eventually ran out so he returned to school. In 1907 he became a monitor, or trainee teacher, at Boogardie State School near Mount Magnet, as the first step in his teaching career. In 1908 and 1909 he attended Perth Normal School (the fore-runner of Perth Modern School) to continue his studies before attending Claremont Teachers' College in 1911 and 1912. He was only able to continue his studies by working in the mines at Mount Magnet during the summer holidays.

The home was not a happy one because of the failure of the Hesperus Dawn, and Thomas's refusal to work for wages. Helena was somewhat of a puritan, while Thomas spent much of his time in hotels. From 1911 he contributed almost nothing to the upkeep of the three younger sons, and was rarely found at home. The three older boys supported their mother and their younger brothers.

Helena eventually moved to Perth with the boys, to a house in Division Street, Welshpool. There are no houses in this street now; it is a highly industrial area. By 1915 Harry was a teacher at Fremantle Boys' School, Tommy was a payroll clerk at the Great Boulder Mine, near Kalgoorlie, Hartley was a civil servant working in Perth, Gordon was living at home and working, and George and Eddie were still at school.

On 1 April 1916 Harry enlisted in the army. His brothers Tommy and Hartley had enlisted the year before. Tommy was killed in action at Pozières in July 1916 and Hartley was wounded in the same engagement. By August Harry had been promoted to Sergeant and sent to the Royal Military College, Duntroon, Canberra,

for training. This College had been open since 1911. Harry's previous military experience with the Army Reserve and as a cadet instructor (and probably also his experience as a teacher) must have alerted the army to his leadership potential. His training at Duntroon continued for the rest of 1916. During this time he must have heard of the death of his brother Tommy in France.

On 23 January 1917 he married his sweetheart Gladys Steadman at Wesley Church, Fremantle. Gladys was a teacher too, and they may have met at Teachers' College. As a wartime wedding, it would have been a small and sombre celebration, with many male relatives and friends absent, and the thought in everyone's mind of the coming separation, perhaps forever.



Sergeant William Henry Anderson (Harry) and his wife Gladys on their wedding day.

On 29 June 1917 Harry embarked from Fremantle on the troopship "Borda", leaving his wife Gladys expecting their first child. After disembarking nearly two months later

at Plymouth, he was posted to the 13th Training Battalion at Codford Military Camp, near Salisbury, where British, Australian and New Zealand troops trained.

He was then appointed Acting Sergeant on command at a Drill course at Jellalabad Barracks, Tidworth, near Salisbury. This was the command centre of the British army. It seemed that Harry showed definite leadership qualities and was involved in training Australian and British troops.

Probably while he was in southern England in the second half of 1917 he was able to visit his brother Hartley who was with the Australian Army Postal Corps based near Salisbury. On 11 December 1917 his son, Henry Ross Anderson, was born. It would have taken him some time to learn the news. Gladys would have sent a letter, not a telegram, as this signified bad news.

On 30 January 1918 Harry left for France, via Southampton, to Le Havre, joining the 51st Battalion which was located on the side of the Ypres-Comines Canal in Belgium. With the withdrawal of Russia from the war in October 1917, a major German offensive occurred on the Western Front in early 1918. The 51st Battalion moved south to Dernancourt on the river Ancre, south of Albert, near Amiens. They launched a critical counter-attack on 5 April where Harry was wounded in action.

His mother wrote to the Australian War Memorial in 1929: "He was only a fortnight in the Battle field, when he got wounded, he got a bullet in the shoulder and as he fell backwards a foot went up and another bullet went in his heel and was 14 days before being extracted, he dragged himself on his stomach to his own company, about 400 yards." Harry was admitted to the 4th General Hospital, France and probably transported by hospital train from Dernancourt to either Camiers or Arques then on to Boulogne where he embarked for England. There he was admitted to the Norfolk War Hospital, Norwich. After two months he was transferred to the 1st Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield, near London, and in June 1918 he was discharged from hospital. After furlough, he reported to Hurdcott, near Salisbury. Harry was classified "C" which meant permanently unfit for Active Service, but fit for Home Service in England.

It was here in August 1918 that Harry found out about a scheme of scholarships for wounded soldiers – a scheme not widely known about today. Harry wrote to his mother saying that he was applying for an Overseas Scholarship to study at university, and hoped to start in September at Manchester.

"The conditions under which this scholarship is granted are these: - A man must be declared permanently unfit for general service. He must be a dominion soldier or sailor – and generally with a pretty decent education to back him up. A year's leave is granted for a start. A grant of £150 to £250 is made in quarterly instalments in advance. A fellow draws no military pay here; but all allotted pay to a dependent goes on as before. (This was important, as Harry was supporting Gladys and baby Ross.) I will still wear the uniform.

"Of course in this country a man has more to keep up than in Australia, but I expect the grant should be sufficient to cover all expenses. It will have to keep me in everything just as if I were a civilian – besides paying for university fees, books etc." He didn't say what he was hoping to study; possibly it was in the area of history or education. In later life he conducted research into both areas in Western Australia. Anyway it was a marvellous opportunity to extend his education.

He also wrote, "I went for a walk last night over a bit of rough ground – and I can tell you it made my ankle pain. So you can guess it is not nearly right as yet – and I don't suppose it will be as strong as before."

Now comes the link with Weymouth! In September 1918 Harry told his mother that he had been transferred to Westham Camp, Weymouth, "...a far more congenial place than Hurdcott. I have had to come down here in connection with the Overseas Scholarship.

"I went before a quack this morning. He asked me various questions and wrote out a card for me and now I have to wait till Friday to go before Ryan, which will be the last Medical Exam, I hope.

"Amongst other remarks the quack put on my papers this morning 'Ankle fairly sound'. I hope old Ryan when he reads it, does not think it is sound enough."

If Harry had been able to speak to Harry Hartnett, a soldier at the camp just weeks before, he would have been less optimistic about his chances. Hartnett says in his memoirs: "Major General C.S. Ryan was a medical tyrant known far and wide throughout the AIF as "Gutzer" Ryan on account of the number of seriously wounded men he had sent back on active service.

A week later Harry wrote in a letter full of exclamation marks:

"My Dear Mother,
Well I've just about struck the limit here! I am sent down here on order from Tidworth. After being classified B/a by the quacks here I have been detailed as Mess Orderly to the Military Police! I'd like to have the running of this army for a while! I have just had a blooming big row up in the Orderly Room! A fellow gets his spirit broken here right enough! Whether or not I shall get this University stunt I don't know! My classification means now that I will be called up for another Medical Board in six months – when I may be passed fit or otherwise! Why on earth he couldn't mark me G and have done with I don't know! Just something more to try a fellow I suppose!"

What a come-down! Instead of starting a university course he was to serve meals and clear tables for the Military Police, the MPs whom nobody liked. But then he turns to the brighter side of his situation.

"Of course as regards a camp this is a better place than Hurdcott. And I suppose when a fellow settles down things will be alright. A fellow can always providing the weather is decent go into the town of an evening. Pictures are always handy here and we get occasional concerts. There is more here to relieve the monotony than in any other camp in England.

"Of course the reason is that all the men being sent back to Australia are here. I suppose the authorities consider these men have earned such treatment. There is much that is of interest round Weymouth. They have a fine long promenade along the beach. The Buildings along here are all modern and the street in this particular place is fairly wide. Weymouth thus appears as a comparatively modern and up to date place. It always seems to present a busy appearance. Last night I took a stroll down near to Portland. The view half way between the two harbours – Weymouth and Portland is rather good – Portland is completely closed in by means of a breakwater – which has only 2 small openings. Seaplanes are

common. One meets fellows he knows every day here. Fellows are constantly coming up to me, whom for the time being I don't remember, but one soon places."

Harry did not have to serve as a Mess Orderly for very long. On 11 November the Armistice was signed and the war was ended. He returned to Australia and was discharged from the army in February 1919.

On his return, Harry resumed his profession of school teacher, teaching at Fremantle Boys' School, and then Leederville and James Street Schools in Perth. He and Gladys had a second son in October 1919, named Thomas Ian after Harry's brother Tommy. In 1923 he was promoted to Head Teacher at Pemberton State School in the tall jarrah and karri forests south of Perth. Subsequent schools where he served as Head Teacher were Wagin and Narrogin in the wheat belt, and then Bayswater in Perth. He bought a house in Hamersley Road, Subiaco, and Ross and Ian attended Perth Modern School.

In 1938 Harry was appointed District Inspector, responsible for all schools in various country and metropolitan districts. Later he also held the position of Superintendent of Libraries, establishing the W.J.Rooney Library for teachers and education students. He developed a system of library boxes – crates of books delivered by rail to remote schools in the State. For most of 1953 he was also Acting Superintendent of Primary Education while the incumbent was on leave. He retired in 1957, after a long and distinguished career in the Western Australian Education Department.

Harry continued studying at night. He researched the early settlement of the Murchison goldfield of Western Australia, which includes the town of Mount Magnet where he had lived as a child. He conducted research into education and gained a Master of Arts at the University of Western Australia in 1938.

In 1928 Harry and Gladys made a trip to Europe. Perhaps they visited the battlefield at Pozières where Tommy was killed and Hartley wounded, and the village of Dernancourt, not far away, where Harry had been wounded two years later. And perhaps they also visited the village of Codford in England where he had trained the Allied soldiers, and Weymouth, where he had had his high hopes dashed.

Harry's sons Ross and Ian both went to university. Ian became an engineer. Ross studied law, won a Rhodes Scholarship and went to Oxford. He became a professor of law in Australian universities. They both joined the army in World War Two and served as officers.

In 1968 Harry and Gladys, on a visit to their son Ian and his family in Victoria (my parents), made a trip up the Hume Highway to see where Harry had spent his early childhood at Pranjip and Longwood. They then continued north to Wangaratta where I was working as a teacher. They also met and approved of the man who was to become my husband, Russell Worthy. It was the last time I saw my grandfather. He died a few months later in August 1968 at the age of 76. After his death Gladys moved to live with my parents in Melbourne. She died in 1976.

Like many returned soldiers, Harry rarely spoke of his wartime experiences. He certainly never said anything to me about them. But the visions of the hell that is war must have remained with him all his life, and infused his desire to improve the education and conditions of all the young children within his charge.