

Jack Duffell



Jack turned 18 while the troop ship was bringing him across the Indian Ocean to fight with the Australian Artillery Corps. As the Battle of the Somme was about to start they were disembarked at Suez and sent quickly by train to the Front. He had promised his mother that he would write to her as often as he could. He kept his word and discovered a liking for letter writing. Eventually he was writing to all his family, including cousins, as well as 25 girls in Australia and 3 in England!

His gun crew, one by one, fell to enemy fire until there were only 3 instead of the necessary 8. Jack was lucky until one night gas shells were fired into their trench. Taking time to yell a warning to his mates meant Jack was badly gassed so had to be evacuated to London. Eventually he came to Fovant (Hurdcott) where he gradually recovered a degree of health. When he was not actually in hospital he was assigned to helping in the kitchens and the Dental Dept (which he did not enjoy). Here the YMCA provided peace and quiet for him to continue his endless letter-writing.

In June 1917 he was adjudged unable to continue in Army life and was repatriated to Australia embarking at Plymouth. Just off the coast of Spain his convoy was attacked by German u-boats and his ship sank. They were rescued by other ships in the convoy and returned to Plymouth.

Setting off again he reached Australia safely. He had written to his mother requesting a body guard in case he was mobbed by the 25 girls to whom he had been writing. He did eventually marry one of them and settled on a block of land granted to him by a grateful government. He lived a full and happy life being elected Mayor for several terms, organising the Home Guard during WW2 and finally dying in 1966 aged 69.

Jack's full story is told in "Soldier Boy" by Gilbert Mant.

M.McKenzie