

# ANZAC Spirit School Prize 2020



Figure 1: Medical Examination Photos of Dr. Yeatman  
(National Archives of Australia, 1941)

**Doctor John Charleton Yeatman**

Service Number: SX15351 (S3315)

By Bich-Loan Nguyen, Year 9  
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College



Considered to be the biggest and deadliest conflict, almost a million Australians served in the second world war lasting from 1939 – 1945 (Australian War Memorial, n.d.). The instability and tension created in European countries from the previous world war sparked another war only 2 decades later. Adolf Hitler’s rise to power proved detrimental for many in his ambitions of world domination. Hitler’s unsuccessful conquest of Poland consequently resulted in Great Britain and France declaring war against Germany (History.com, 2019). Being a part of the British empire, Australia was among many nations to declare war against the Nazi Germans (AWM London, n.d.). During World War II, Australia had lost 34,000 service personnel, 72,814 battle casualties and over 31,000 Australians became prisoners-of-war. 22,000 of which were held captive by the Japanese and by August 1945, over a third of them succumbed to the gruesome conditions of prisoner-of-war camps (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This war would be the first time in Australian history that Australian soldiers were conscripted to battle overseas (National Museum of Australian, n.d.). Among the many stories of these gallant servicemen and women is the story of John Charleton Yeatman, a man devoted to his companions and nation.

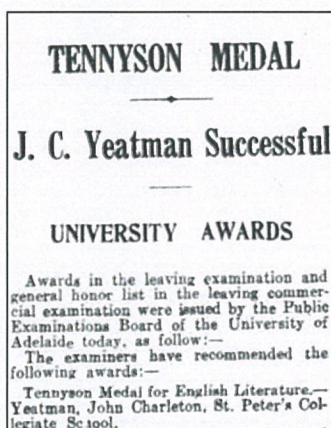


Figure 2: John Charleton Yeatman featured in a news article after winning a Tennyson Medal (News, 1931).

John Charleton Yeatman was born at the Royal Adelaide Hospital on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1914, the eldest of four children to Charleton Yeatman and Mignonette DesVignes Yeatman. Shortly after his birth, the great war began and his father enlisted whereas his mother trained as a nurse (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). John was educated at St. Peter’s College and excelled in his studies winning a Tennyson medal for English Literature in the leaving examination (Figure 2). There he discovered his love for athletics and was a member of the chapel choir and an altar boy (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). He completed his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery graduating from the University of Adelaide on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1938 (Appendix 1).

John was the last of three generations of medical practitioners who served South Australia for over a century. His grandfather, John Walter Yeatman, practiced in Auburn and his father practiced in Port Pirie and Unley Park. Moreover, his father served the Australian army during and after both world wars (Tony Seymour, 2019). Only a year after graduation, John was a part of the resident medical officers at the Royal Adelaide Hospital (Appendix 2).

In 1940, a second world war occurred, and John had a dilemma. His pacifist beliefs prevented him from enlisting. However, he felt a strong sense of obligation and eventually enlisted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1941 in Wayville (Appendix 3). John describes:



*“I think that it was related to the fact that during those years as a university student, and partly under Maurice’s influence, I became a pacifist, quite a keen one. When the war came, I was in a quandary. I didn’t know what to do... I felt that it was very wrong that I was not enlisting.”* (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004)

John received an Australian Imperial Force (AIF) appointment towards the end of 1941 to the Middle East. He embarked for the war-torn Middle East in December on the Dutch hospital ship ‘Oranje’ (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004) (Figure 3). Upon his arrival in Gaza, he waited a tediously long fortnight before joining the 9<sup>th</sup> division field ambulance unit (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). John’s ambulance unit was concerned with the 24<sup>th</sup> brigade. His first experience of active warfare was harrowing; treating casualties and sending the injured back to the main dressing station (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). Their departure back to Australia was delayed when the German forces pressed the British forces at El Alamein. Through Cairo, up the west side of the Nile delta and along the coast road west towards El Alamein approximately 80 miles, they arrived as reinforcements. This sanguinary battle would later be referred to as the battle of El Alamein.

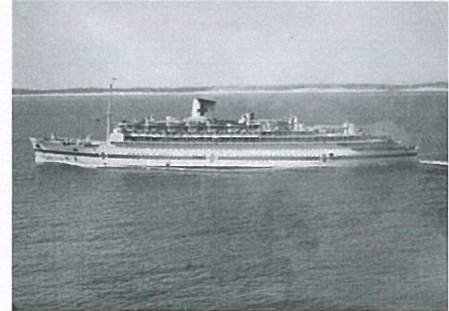


Figure 3: Photograph of Dutch hospital ship ‘Oranje’ (Australian War Memorial, 1941).

In 1943, John was transferred to the 2/48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion as their Regimental Medical Officer and was later promoted to captain through his resolute actions (Virtual War Memorial, n.d. and John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). There was a ten-day struggle which John describes:

*“The troops had a very hard time. They didn’t really have sleep, or food, for ten days. Those who were wounded were evacuated through the most expeditious channel.”*  
(John Charleton Yeatman, 2004)

Heartbreakingly separated from his family in an unfamiliar region, John dutifully served his country embodying the ANZAC qualities of courage and perseverance. John courageously entered the battlefield with the intention of aiding allied forces despite knowing that axis forces were conquering the battlefield. The battalion’s gallantry actions, tenacity and encouragement towards one another throughout the battle proved successful and axis forces retreated.



*“The Battle of El Alamein remains one of the most impressive examples of Australian resilience and tenacity in a theatre of war, with a significant contribution made by the South Australian men of the 2/48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion”* (Veterans SA, 2015)



Figure 4: 9<sup>th</sup> Division Parade in Gaza (Australian War Memorial, 1942)

Although a bloody and uncertain battle, the battle at El Alamein proved successful for the men of the 2/48<sup>th</sup> Battalion and axis forces retreated by the 6<sup>th</sup> of November (Australian War Memorial, n.d.). On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, the 2/48<sup>th</sup> Battalion left El Alamein and embarked for Gaza where they partook in the 9<sup>th</sup> division parade (Australian War Memorial, n.d.) (Figure 4). After losing many fearless soldiers to death and sickness alike, the battalion was reorganised for jungle operations (Australian War Memorial, n.d. and John Charleton Yeatman, 2004).

John was given leave during the Christmas period then progressed to Queensland for jungle operations. Sacrificing many of his valuable training opportunities, John watched and cared for the battalion members who couldn't embark to New Guinea because of age and other conditions.

*“That took a lot of time, so I didn't do much training myself. It resulted in the fact that I wasn't hardened – not physically fit – when we went to New Guinea, so I felt the fatigue of carrying all my own gear through the high kunai grass under the hot sun”* (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004)

After an exhausting journey to Lae, the battalion was given instructions to go to Sattelberg; an old German mission station where the Japanese were entrenched (Australian War Memorial, n.d.). The Japanese ambushed using mountain guns resulting in the shrapnel killing the officer in command and adjutant.

John embodied the ANZAC quality of resourcefulness during this battle. Using the limited resources available, John dealt with the battalion member's injuries and in the process, was wounded himself. Nevertheless, he prioritised other's wounds before his; a true act of selflessness (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). The ANZAC Spirit of mateship was prominent when John refused to seek treatment for his injury and focused on treating his fellow comrades. He was evacuated to a hospital in Gona only after treating as many people as he possibly could (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). This injury would prevent him from re-joining the battalion until after the war and he was replaced by captain Douglas Campbell Pope on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November (Mark Johnston 2014, pg. 257).



He returned to Australia and married the love of his life, Elizabeth Elliot Seymour on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1944 at St. Peter's College Chapel (Figure 5). John joined a refresher course for people who wanted to go back into general practice and joined his father's medical group in Hyde Park (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). His general practice career began in 1946 and lasted for 40 years. Elizabeth and John lived in a house on King William street later moving to Unley Park (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). Their first daughter, Anna, was born on boxing day in 1948 and their second daughter, Ruth, was born in November 1950. In 1959, his father, Charleton Yeatman, passed away. Prior to Charleton's death, he established 3 practice centres. One at Cross Road, Goodwood Road and King William Road. John and Elizabeth moved to Cross Road to inherit Charleton's practice centre. Furthermore, John had a clinical assistantship with Dr. Sangster from the medical outpatient department at the Royal Adelaide Hospital and another assistantship at the Adelaide Children's Hospital (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004).



Figure 5: John and Elizabeth's marriage news (The Advertiser, 1944)

After the second world war, general practitioners from England formed a College of General Practitioners in Britain and developed branches in Australian states. The Australian branches decided to amalgamate forming an Australian College and acquired the royal prefix (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). John replaced his father in the Commonwealth committee dealing with complaints against general practitioners and was a part of the South Australian committee of the College of General Practitioners (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004). John was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Art Gallery of South Australia from 1964 – 1979 and greatly contributed to the expansion and philosophy of the gallery however, he declined an offer to be the chairman.

He believed that working practitioners should contribute to the education of new doctors and his contributions were acknowledged. He ran the Council of the University of Adelaide from 1976 – 1980 and from 1982 – 1990 (Tony Seymour, 2019) (Appendix 4).

John retired from his medical practice in 1986 at the age of 72. He travelled around the world in 1987 going to Canada to visit Elizabeth's family and visiting old friends in England. As Elizabeth's health began deteriorating, they moved to the Coach House Mew. She suffered from peripheral neuritis caused by B12 deficiency (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004).

*"After Betty died in 2003, I became increasingly lonely and miserable, but a move to the hostel came in October 2004, and it was an enormous relief" (John Charleton Yeatman, 2004)*



John Charleton Yeatman died of natural causes on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2006 aged 91. His funeral was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2006 (State Library of South Australia, n.d.) and is buried at Centennial Park Cemetery (Find a Grave, n.d.). During and after his years in military service, he saved many lives and dutifully served Australia embodying each of the ANZAC qualities in his own way. His death brought grief upon his loved ones and his contributions to the community and the development of many colleges were all acknowledged in his lifetime.

John was devoted to his patients, many of whom were to him and attended his funeral years after his retirement. In addition to his successful career as a medical practitioner, he was described by many to be a devoted friend and adviser (Tony Seymour, 2019). His dedication to his patients and nation never faltered once. The life of this extraordinary man and his loyalty to his country is one that should not be lost to time.

Part A Word Count: 1,410 words

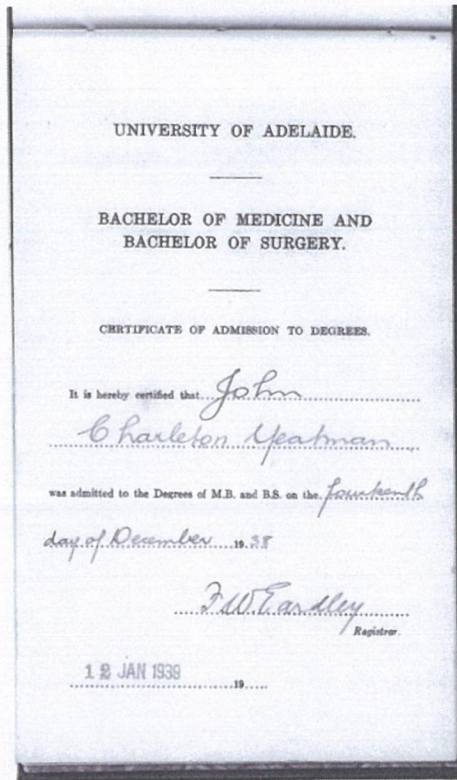
Part B Word Count: 210 words

**Total Word Count:** 1620 words

Appendices on the next page.



Appendix 1: John's degree certificate of M.B.B.S



Appendix 2: Resident Medical Officers from the Royal Adelaide Hospital, 1939



Appendix 3: John's Attestation Form.

COPY TO 2nd ECHELON  
12 DEC 1941  
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES  
AA Form A.20.

ATTESTATION FORM  
FOR SPECIAL FORCES RAISED FOR SERVICE IN AUSTRALIA OR ABROAD.

Army No. *SX16367*  
Surname *YEATMAN* Other Names *John Charles*  
Unit *A.M.C.*  
Enlisted for service at *Wagga* (Place)  
*N.S.W.* (State) *1939* (Date)

Questions to be put to persons called out or presenting themselves for voluntary enlistment.

1. What is your name? *YEATMAN*  
Other names *John Charles*

2. Where were you born? *Adelaide*  
in the state or country of *South Australia*

3. Are you a natural born or a naturalized British Subject? If the latter, papers are to be produced. *national born*

4. What is your age and date of birth? *27 1/2 years*  
Date of Birth *July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1914.*

5. What is your trade or occupation? *medical practitioner*

6. Are you married, single or widower? *single*

7. Have you previously served on active service? If so, where and in what arm? *no.*

8. Who is your natural next of kin? (Order of relationship—wife, eldest son, eldest daughter, father, mother, eldest brother, eldest sister, eldest half-brother, eldest half-sister)  
*D. C. Yeatman*  
Address *188 Cross Roads, Malvern, S.A.*  
Relationship *Father*

9. What is your permanent address? *188 Cross Roads, Malvern, South Australia*

10. What is your religious denomination? (This question need not be answered if the man has a conscientious objection to doing so.) *Christian (C. of E.)*

3. *John Charles Yeatman* do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true and that I am willing to serve in the Australian Military Forces within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

Witnessed by *Charles Phillip High* (Signature of Attesting or Witnessing Officer) *J. C. Yeatman* (Signature)

\*The person will be warned that should he give false answers to any of these questions he will be liable to heavy penalties under section 56 of the Defence Act.

John's Service Medals (Left to Right): The 1939 – 1945 Star, the Africa Star, the Pacific Star, the Defence Medal, the War Medal 1939 – 1945 and the Australian Service Medal 1939 – 1945.



John's Grandparents (Katherine and John Walter Yeatman).





Appendix 4: Council of the University of Adelaide 1985



COUNCIL MEMBERS AND STAFF, February 1985.

Front row: Mr. J.C. Yeatman, Professor J.P. Quirk, Dr. E.H. Medlin (Senior Deputy Chancellor), Dame Roma Mitchell (Chancellor), Professor D.R. Stranks (Vice-Chancellor), Mr. Mervyn K. Smith, Judge I.E. Stevens.  
 Second row: Miss V.T. Baddams, Dr. J.T.B. Linn, Mr. D.M. Ferguson, Professor L.W. Cox, Mrs. M.J. Meyler, Professor A.C. Castles, Miss W.A. Jolly (Minute Secretary), Mr. D. Hardy.  
 Back row: Mr. D.R. Beecher (Bursar), Mr. D.G. McKie (Snr. Assistant Registrar), Mr. R. Culver, Dr. I.N. Capon, Dr. J.T. Hyde, Professor P.H. Glow (1984 Chairman, Education Committee), Mr. F.J. O'Neill (Registrar), Mr. E.W. Benham, Mr. M.C. Stock, Dr. J.T. Wiskich.

A letter written to John's family.

SX 15351  
 Capt. J.C. Yeatman  
 2/48 Bond St. Bn  
 1960-42

Dear Family,

How are you all? There's little news here except that we had 2 very filthy days, - a stormy wet wild night followed by the worst dust storm we've had. Since then the weather has been definitely cooler, so I suppose summer is now over.

I had a very happy letter from Maurice Finnis this week, giving a most delightful account of John's exploits and progress.

I read a very good short book about Greece and the Greek Campaign, called "Remember Greece" by Dilys Powell. It must be a very pleasant country to walk through.

This week we've been by the beach, + had a lovely swim one morning before breakfast. A mobile cinema visited us also and showed "Little Nellie Kelly", - quite a pleasure

diversion and it came over as good as in a theatre at home.

The clouds + sunsets have been very lovely lately, but the days still warm.

Doug Stephens paid me a visit, + it was very nice to see him. Also saw Frank Winstford, who's back with his unit again.

The unit ran a shop for the men to buy Xmas presents from. I was very busy at the time + could only make a hasty purchase, but bought 2 dress lengths, one for Mister + one for me. I hope you like the colours etc: they're 2 light-weight pieces of clothe, suitable for February + March.

Herewith also the unit Xmas card, - not a very wonderful piece of work but the best that Alex could produce for a reasonable price. This is the famous station around which the 48<sup>th</sup> fought in their original attack on July 10<sup>th</sup> + subsequently.

Hope you all have a very happy Christmas, + that when you get this things will look very much brighter. All my love to you all

John  
 22 Oct 42.



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### Images:

Figure 1: National Archives of Australia. (1939 - 1948). *Yeatman John Charleton*. [online] (page 23 of 32) Available at: <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6399756> [Accessed 25 April 2020]

Figure 2: News. (1931). 'TENNYSON MEDAL'. [online] *News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954)*, 9 January, p. 11. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/128995584?browse=ndp%3Abrowse%2Ftitle%2FN%2Ftitle%2F461%2F1931%2F01%2F09%2Fpage%2F11065885%2Farticle%2F128995584> [Accessed 8 May 2020].

Figure 3: Australian War Memorial. (n.d.). *Allies in Adversity, Australia and the Dutch in the Pacific War: Hospital Ship Oranje*. [image] Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/alliesinadversity/seafaring/oranje> [Accessed 8 May 2020] (note: website is undated, but the photo was taken in 1941)



Figure 4: Australian War Memorial. (n.d.). *Gaza, Palestine. 1942-12-22. Flags of the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Division Units at the Parade*. [image] Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C14815> [Accessed 8 May 2020] (note: website is undated, but the photo was taken in 1942)

Figure 5: The Advertiser. (1944). 'ITEMS of Interest'. [online] *The Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954)*, 14 March, p. 3. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/48788554?searchTerm=john%20charleton%20yeatman&searchLimits=#> [Accessed 8 May 2020].

Appendix 1: Scanned Document. (1939). Certificate of Admission to Degrees.

Appendix 2: State Library of South Australia. (1939). *Resident Medical Officers of the Royal Adelaide Hospital*. [image] Available at: <https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/B+70415> [Accessed 8 May 2020]

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Photograph of John's service medals + Scanned letter written to John's family:  
Yeatman Family Papers, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, MSS 0040

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