



**Albert
Whitmore
1899-2002**

Jessica Inglis, Loxton High School

Albert Whitmore

'Walk softly from this hill side, cast not a backward look. Know that your name is written, tall in heaven's book. Sleep gently valiant digger, cherished throughout the years, as proudly we salute you-our glorious pioneer.' These are the words spoken at Albert Whitmore's funeral reflecting his life where he did not serve in just one but two world wars.

In 1899 August 14th in Tea Tree Gully, 20km North of Adelaide Albert Ernest Whitmore was brought into the world by father, William Whitmore and mother, Ada Annie Whitmore.

Albert grew up out bush and riding horses. He was brought up in a very strong Christian family atmosphere and knew what hard work was. According to an interview filmed for a television series 'Australians at war' filmed 2nd May 2000, Albert described his childhood as a lonely life with going to Sunday school every week and for his enjoyment going out and hunting rabbits in the hills. During school holidays Albert would spend his time picking grapes and, in the Christmas, holidays cutting apricots. From leaving Primary school at thirteen years of age Albert went straight on to working for his neighbour Mr. J. Farrow working with sheep. After a year Albert went on to an apprenticeship with Houghton Bakers, working in the bakehouse at night and delivering during the day. After his apprenticeship, at just fifteen years of age he became the assistant baker with Summertown baker, however, within a few weeks he became head baker due to the previous head baker breaking his leg. This taught Albert his ability to cope in almost any situation. These years for Albert were good, participating in the things he loved such as playing football, horse riding, competing in athletics and even winning Sheffield one-hundred-yard sprint. By being involved in these events this helped Albert prepare for war as he learned the skills of horse riding became fitter and stronger not just physically but mentally too.

January 10th, 1917, Albert's parents signed the consent for him to join the army at 17. Despite being underage Albert continued and passed the horse-riding test with ease on his first try. He went on and trained in Mitcham, South Australia and in Seymour, Victoria. During the training they were taught discipline, how to take orders and handle rifles, amongst several other things. Throughout their training the core values of the ANZAC spirit perseverance and mateship were key elements.

On the 5th of March 1917, at the age of 18 Bert was enlisted in the 9th Light Horse regiment, 28th reinforcement. Albert set off from Port Melbourne for six weeks at sea to arrive at Port Suez, Egypt, to undertake a few weeks of desert condition trainings. Whilst training in Egypt the regiment were introduced to their horses. Little did they know the mateship and bond they would form with these horses.

The next stop for Albert was to the front line at Gaza.

When arriving, the 9th light horse regiment were close to accomplishing the so-called claimed "impossible mission" advancing in Beersheba. After two failed attempts on attacking in Gaza, they began the third attack with zero intentions of advancing on the Turks

but rather to create a diversion for the real attack on Beersheba. Within six days three diversions were portrayed for the Turks to believe for another frontal attack. Meanwhile this made it a lot easier for the British to make a move on the Turk's defence line.

Beersheba was a dreadful place that was boggy and cold, but they needed the water-rich town for the horses who had been without water for a day and a half. On the 31st of October 1917, the British troops were successful in advancing into Beersheba leading to the mad panic for the Turkish defence line back at Gaza. Due to the perseverance of the British it allowed them to take control with little resilience from the Turks.

Christmas of 1917 was cold and continuously raining, with no shelter. It was nothing short of miserable with the slight excitement of a few Christmas presents that arrived on Christmas night. After the success, the 9th light horse regiment had in Gaza, they continued to ride North along the Mediterranean coast. The temperatures they faced, of up to 48 degrees Celsius with extreme humidity, brought out value of the ANZAC spirit, perseverance. The group then set up camp by the Jordan river along with thousands of other troops. The river could only be crossed by a pontoon that was regularly guarded by Albert's unit.

30th April 1918 the famous Es Salt Raid began. A village 23km west from Amman that resulted in 1348 casualties. The Brit's aim was to attack the main railway junction at Deraa. Initially the operation progressed well however the Turkish were nothing but resistant. They commenced several counter attacks cutting off the easier of two escape routes leaving Albert and the rest of the raiding force with no choice but to withdraw. They were left with casualties, diseases and only 800 effective rifles. They were quick to make the decision to try and ride out of the trap to get away. They had to climb over cliffs and crags and unfortunately many horses fell to their death, however, their successful retreat is known as one of history's most epic. Their courage during the retreat demonstrated the core values of the ANZAC spirit.

Unfortunately, at this point the wounded had to be left behind. Everyone was tired and exhausted, but within a few hours they were back in action again. They moved forward to protect the crossing of the river Jordan. Here they dug funk holes (small trenches just big enough for two men). This was where Albert experienced his first air-raid. Luckily, the trenches kept all men safe but the horses on the other hand were not so lucky.

Whilst in the Jordan Valley, Albert's adventures were cut short when he was struck down with Malaria. A few of Albert's mates thought it would be the last they would see of him but with three months of good nursing, he was back into action. There was not much time for Albert back out on the field as shortly after his recovery the armistice was signed, ending the war. Albert's journey home was delayed by three months, he used that time serving in a quartermaster's store. He later reunited with the 9th light horse regiment and returned home to Australia on the 10th of July 1919.

After returning to Adelaide the light horseman gathered and marched through the city to Keswick Barracks, from Albert's personal diary he recounts *'everyone looks spic and span, boot-legging polished, spurs shining, new emu feather in hat. The whole unit formed up the parade, various speeches. Then came the order from major Parson, "parade attention 9th*

Australian light horse dismissed." This was the saddest moment I am sure, here in a band of men who had been together in thick and thin, ordered to dismiss, never to be put together as a unit again. In hour they would be scattered far and wide, all with memories of comradeship.'

A quote from Albert in Bert's Story, that *'it was like the breaking up of a family.'*

After Albert's return, he went to the Riverland as a part of a government surveying team. This surveying team's purpose was to set up a soldier settlement near Lake Bonney for returning servicemen to make a new start in civilian life.

Albert, along with his mates Bill Garrard and Andrew Collins, two returning 9th light horse servicemen started the local bakery in August 1922. The successful bakery is still in business today. In 1924 Albert married Kathleen Whitmore who was the niece of his business partner Andrew Collins. Unfortunately, Albert and Kathleen experienced a tragic loss of their first child at birth. Kathleen became very ill and while recovering Albert decided to sell his share of the business to his other partners. Once her health returned, they later raised two children, Murray, and Shirley. Albert then went into farming sheep and built his own slaughterhouse. He later opened his own butcher shop, however, due to Albert becoming ill with rheumatic fever he decided to sell the business.

21st October 1941, Albert enlisted to WW2. He first became part of the citizen military force but shortly after was transferred to the Loveday internment camp where he was stationed for the next six years (pictured in figure 1). Albert served as staff sergeant and oversaw 42 engineers. He was later discharged for the final time on the 28th of April 1947.



Bert pictured at
Loveday Internment Camp.

Figure 1 Bert pictured at
Loveday internment camp.

After WW1 Albert joined the Barmera RSL and became a committee member. This was the beginning of Albert's ongoing community involvement.

After WW2, Albert continued to demonstrate the ANZAC spirit. His biggest contribution to the community was his role as secretary in the Barmera District War Memorial Community Centre, which lasted 22 years. The Barmera community centre was involved in developing projects such as the lake foreshore, memorial oval, showgrounds, trotting track, the caravan park, and playgrounds as well as organise social get togethers for returned servicemen and their families. Amongst other things Albert was the Barmera Show Secretary for 25 years, Treasurer of the Bonney Lodge Homes for the Aged for 16 years and a life member of the Barmera Football Club, RSL and Show Society. Albert received a Paul Harris Rotary fellowship award (figure 3) and in 1982 was named Riverland citizen of the year. In 1999 Albert received the 80th anniversary armistice remembrance medal (seen in figure 2). After spending the remainder of his life in Barmera, Albert died at the age of 102 on the 26th of July 2002 being the last surviving Light horse and WW1 South Australian serviceman. As a celebration of his life Albert was given a State funeral on the 2nd of August 2002. He leaves behind his two children Murray and Shirley along with seven grandchildren and seventeen great-grandchildren.



World War One and World War Two, Medals.

Figure 2 Albert's WW1 and WW2 medals.



Grand-daughter Helen Hutchinson, Bert and his son Murray at the "Paul Harris Fellow" award presentation.

Figure 3 Albert receiving the Paul Harris Award along side granddaughter Helen Hutchinson and son Murray.



Kathleen and Bert- Photo taken October 8th 1964, at their Diamond Wedding Celebrations, held at their home, 4 Laffer Street, Barmera S.A.

Figure 4 Albert pictured with his wife Kathleen.

Part B:

Beginning my research, I started with a long-distance relative Edmond Inglis however he was not very well known and died early on in his first battle at war resulting in there being minimal information on him. Edmond also was not local; I was not engaged by him at all. I then decided I was going to find another soldier and later found out that my neighbour's great-grandfather Albert Whitmore was the last South Australian WW1 serviceman to pass. Albert was a local living in Barmera and had many different connections with the community. The involvement he had in Barmera setting up facilities such as the playground, caravan park, sporting facilities and the Bakery have been part of my life growing up in this region.

After hearing about Albert, I was immediately intrigued and left wanting to know more. I then began to investigate websites such as the Australian War memorial, virtual Australian war memorial and the National archives of Australia to gather the basic grounding information of Albert. From these websites I found things such as the regiment he was part of, the battles he fought in and in-depth descriptions of those battles. Nearly everything and anything I found I noted down on a word document. I was later fortunate enough to have access to several primary and secondary resources such as books, diary entries, newspaper articles, letters, and interviews from one of Albert's grandchildren Helen Hutchinson who lives in Barmera. Over the years Helen had collected these valuable resources which will become a keepsake for future generations. I spent hours upon hours reading through these primary and secondary sources where from there I was able to connect my notes I had written down earlier and turned it into his story. Within these resources there were quotes, pictures, journals, and personal recounts from Albert himself. There were also letters he had received from people such as Queen Elizabeth II and John Howard (Figure 5 and 6) and stories/recounts from other people about Albert and what he was like. This information then allowed me to get an insight into his time spent on the frontline and what it was like to be a soldier during this period. It then would allow me to go back to the other websites I previously researched to consolidate my information such as battles he fought in. By continuing this process, I eventually put all the pieces of the puzzle together and the above story being the result. This experience has left me with a greater understanding and knowledge of the first world war than I had prior, I particularly found learning of the scope and geography of the war most interesting. This assignment has given me a great appreciation of the life I live and further gratitude to the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who fought, suffered, and died.



*Mr Albert Whitmore
Bonny Lodge
Hawdon Street
BARMERA SA 5345*

I am pleased to hear that you are celebrating your One-Hundredth Birthday. My sincere congratulations and best wishes for a happy day on Saturday the 14th of August 1999.

ELIZABETH R.

Figure 5 letter from Queen Elizabeth II.

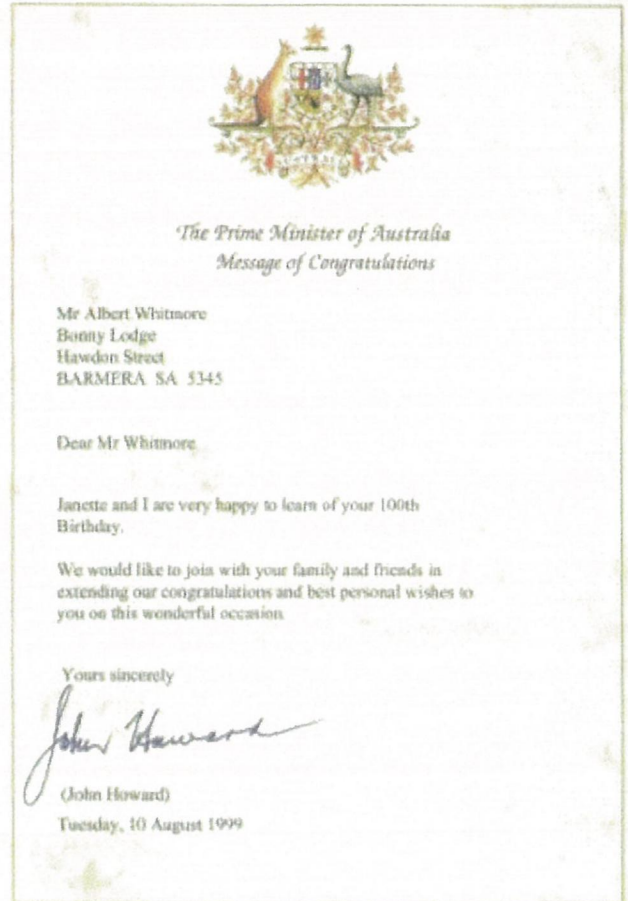


Figure 6 letter from John Howard.

Bibliography

Australian Government 2021, *National Archives of Australia*, viewed 10 May 2021, <<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ListingReports/ItemsListing.aspx>>.

Australian Light Horse Association 2021, *Albert Whitmore*, viewed 10 May 2021, <<https://www.lighthouse.org.au/albert-whitmore/>>.

Australian War Memorial 2021, *9th Australian Light Horse Regiment*, viewed 12 May 2021, <<https://www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search?query=9th+light+horse>>.

Anzac portal 2021, *Australian Light Horse in World War 1*, viewed 12 May 2021, <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/military-organisation/australian-imperial-force/australian-light-horse>>.

Farrell, F & Pope, R 1994, 'Facing a Daunting mix of Turkish Fire, Blistering Heat, Cold and Rain', in C Bean (ed.), *Diggers and mates*, Australian department of veterans affairs, Sydney. 'Mateship was the Greatest thing' 2001, *Australians at War*, ABC TV, Sydney, 2 May, ABC iview

Gordon, D 2001, 'Even at age 101, time has not wearied this living legend', *The Advertiser*, 23 April, pp. 130-130.

Howard, J 1999, pers. comm., 10 August.

Hutchinson, H n.d., *NO.9 Internment Camp Diagram*

King, J 2002, 'Light Horseman fought at Gaza', *The Australian*, 29 July, pp. 76-76.

Monument Australia 2021, *Private Albert Whitmore*, viewed 12 May 2021, <<https://monumentaaustralia.org.au/themes/people/military/display/50113-private-albert-whitmore>>.

Noyce, P 1994, *Bert's Story*, The Barmera District War Memorial Community Centre Incorporated, Berri, SA.

Tilly, R 1994, 'Bert's story launch celebrates 95th birthday', *The Murray Pioneer*, 23 August, pp. 6-6.

Virtual War Memorial Australia 2021, *Albert Ernest Whitmore*, viewed 10 May 2021, <<https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/565262>>.

Whitmore, A 1980, *A.E. Whitmore Highlights*, Hand written diary, Personal account, Barmera, Sa.

Windsor, E 1999, pers. comm., 14 August.