

North Descendants History Book: Clarrie North

Private Hero Clarence North: 23rd May 1895 - 5th November 1916

We go back in time to 13th March 1916, when a young West Coast man with dark brown hair and hazel eyes, travels to Adelaide to enlist in the Base Light Horse Division of The Australian Imperial Force.

He is given the rank of Private and assigned to the 5th Pioneer Battalion and is sent to the Base Light Horse Depot at Mitcham S.A for training.

The young man was Hero Clarence (Clarrie) North, second son of Hero Clare & Rosina Ann North (nee Boylan) and grand-son of West Coast Pioneers, George & Lydia North, the first Greek to settle in S.A.

Clarrie was born on 23 May 1895 and raised at Newland Grange, Colton and worked mostly on his family's farm. He was a clever athlete, receiving a silver cup (photo [1] below) to acknowledge his winning the Colton Sheffield Handicap on the 18th March 1912.



He and his brother James (Jim) were also football players of "some standing" for the Colton Football Club. Just before Clarrie enlisted they played in a Patriotic Match against McLachlan FC on an oval 300 metres west of Mount Wedge Homestead. After the game a dance was arranged in J Bascomb's woolshed with popular musicians Clarrie, Jim and Alex North providing modern music with gifted singer and Clarrie's sweetheart Barbara (Babs) Fraser on vocals. When the night was almost at an end, it was discovered that someone had released all of the horses from the yard, so the dance continued until morning when the horses were found. Clarrie was also a singer with a splendid voice and finally closed the dance with the then popular song Farewell Ezabelle [6]. The Norths were a well known musical family and played and sang at many events on the West Coast and as far afield as The Kings Ballroom on King William Street in Adelaide.



Clarrie was in training for the South Australian Mounted Police when England and its allies were thrust into WW1. After his training at Mitcham he had three days leave to go home to Colton and say good-bye to his family, but his sweetheart Babs Fraser was away on holidays and never saw him again. It is not known if Clarrie sent letters home to Babs from the Western Front, but she waited five years before eventually marrying Walter Whitehead on 17th August 1921 in Adelaide, she was 28 years old at the time.

This photo [2], Hero Clarence "Clarrie" North

On the 11th April 1916 his battalion embarked from Outer Harbour S.A on their journey to the other side of the world aboard the HMAS Aeneas arriving in the Suez on 16th June 1916. Clarrie's 14 year old cousin Nora Anastasia North was there to bid him farewell. From there they travelled to Alexandria in Egypt, where they boarded the H.T Ivernia, which takes hem to Marseilles, France, arriving on the 29th June 1916. From Marseilles they travelled inland by train to Etaples where they engaged in active service on 31st August 1916. It was the Battle of Somme, which stretched across a 40Km front on both sides of the River Somme and which on it's first day (1/7/1916) claimed the lives of more than 19,000 British Empire troops. It was one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War with more than a million casualties.

We have been kindly given a copy of a letter that Clarrie wrote to his sister Mary, dated Wednesday 1st November 1916, in which he describes the recent days activities and events including the shrapnel wounding of his cousin Hero A Boylan. Clarrie describes being "in the thick of battle with canons all around us" and "when all them guns are bombarding, it's like henny penny thought, you'd think the sky was falling and they're always firing and the infantry and all the others are in front between our artillery and germans so there is shells roaring over the top all day and night".



This photo [3] Clarrie (front centre) Ambrose Boylan (back centre) & Hero Boylan (back right).

Hero A Boylan died from stomach wounds later that day.

It was just three days later on the 4th November 1916, in the same "Battle of The Somme", that Clarrie received a gunshot wound to the chest and was taken to the Heilly field

hospital where he died the next day. He was laid to rest on 5th November 1916 at the Heilly Station Cemetery (**photos [4&5] below**), Mericourt-L'Abbe, Somme, France.



Hero & Rosina received the telegram (the bitter yellow rain as it was then called) a week or two later, advising that their son had been killed in action on the battlefields of France.

He was awarded the Victory Medal; British War Medal and the 1914/1915 Star and a Memorial Plaque & scroll, which were sent home to Hero & Rosina in December 1922. British historian Sir James Edmonds stated, "It is not too much to claim that the foundations of the final victory on the Western Front were laid by the Somme offensive of 1916.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs website,

“Australian forces moved to France from Egypt in early 1916 after resting, refitting and re-organising, following the Gallipoli campaign the previous year. From 1916 to 1918 Australian troops in France and Belgium fought in some of the most momentous and costly battles in our history. More Australians were killed in battle or died of their wounds on the Western Front than in all other battles ever fought by Australia.”

[1] Photo supplied by Bernadette North

[2] Photo supplied by Evelyn Nelson

[3] Photo supplied by Paul Willis

[4] Photo supplied by Mario Jaspers

[5] Photo supplied by Simon Kopli

[6] book entitled: Across the Bar to Waterloo Bay

Written and researched by Mario Jaspers.