

ALAN DRURY

My name is Alan Drury and I was born in Goole, Yorkshire, England on the 19th of May 1890. I was the sixth of eight children, five girls (Ida, Ethyl, Elsie *, Olive and Lucy) and three boys (William "Billy", Ezra and me). Ezra was the eldest and Lucy the youngest. Sadly Ezra died from accidental drowning in his early 20's. Olive was an accomplished pianist and had her Trinity College letters when she was eighteen years of age. She married Douglas Buttle and they had one child Derek who became a senior lecturer in Architecture at Manchester University.

My father (Arthur) was a seaman. He was Chief Engineer and later Captain of a large merchant ship. My mother (Elizabeth nee Dunne) was a somewhat stern woman and quite aloof but she did have a big family.

I went to school in Goole and had a good basic education. I enjoyed playing cricket and football. One of our teachers was Mr Robbins whose son became captain of the England cricket team. I thought Mr Robbins was rather mean to me and decided to get my revenge. One day he positioned himself close to my bat and he probably wished he had been elsewhere. I was also a choirboy at the local Church of England church.

As a boy I went to sea on my father's ship and sailed with him to many countries including Russia. They were good times and I liked being with my father. When I was eighteen I landed in New Zealand at Auckland and took the chance to leave the ship and experience life in a new country.

I travelled to Hamilton and got a job as a steeplejack, not a preferred occupation but the pay was good and one did not decline any opportunity for paid employment. Then I was offered the job of groom at the Ruakura Agricultural Research Station. The job also entailed delivering farm produce to some places in Hamilton, for example eggs to the Hamilton Hotel. Sometimes I had to take a horse and gig to collect Prime Minister William Massey from the Frankton Railway Station and return him there after his visit to Ruakura. Mr Massey was a generous man always gave me a pound for taking him. "Many a quid I had off Bill Massey", I was happy to say.

I liked Hamilton and bought a section for a house in Hillcrest. However, I never got to use it and I lost my job at Ruakura in unfortunate circumstances. My boss was the Farm Manager "Primrose" McConnell and he had two lovely daughters. The girls were keen to go to a dance at Cambridge and I offered to take them in the horse and gig. We had a great time. However, the use of government property (the horse and gig) was not approved of by Primrose and I was asked to leave. Pity as I enjoyed the job and took great pride in making sure the horses and their gear always looked their best. Sometime later I received a letter from Ruakura offering me my job back. Maybe the girls helped with that but by then I had moved on.

In Wellington work was scarce but I managed to get a job as an Engineer at Petone. Not that I was a qualified engineer but thought I had learned a little from working on my father's ship. One had to adopt a "can do" approach or go without work and money to survive. It was six months before I was found out so it was time to keep moving.

I went to the South Island and settled in Timaru. I drove the fourth taxi that was ever there and even worked at the Port for a time. The manual lifting of sacks of produce to load and unload the ships was hard work. I liked Timaru and I had a good place to stay in Barnard Street. It was not far to Caroline Bay and on most days I would swim across the bay and back. I later moved to King Street. Always on the lookout to earn a bob or two, I did some spar boxing with Bobby Fitzsimmons who was the world featherweight boxing champion and lived in Timaru. He was a clever fighter and not about to be knocked down by the local amateurs who were lined up to take him on. The sparring money was not much but it was welcome.

War was imminent and enlistment was encouraged so I joined up. It seemed a cheap and easy way to get a trip home to England and see my sisters. Enlistment required a medical examination and my medical certificate showed that I was 24 years and 7 months old, 5 feet 7 inches in height with dark brown hair, grey eyes, weighed 147 pounds, Church of England religion with next of kin my father Arthur Drury of 19 Dunhill Road, Goole. Being fit and healthy the doctor said I must have grown up eating plenty of Yorkshire pudding. I was enlisted on the 6th of January 1915 and became 6/1830 Pte Alan Drury of the 1st Battalion Canterbury Infantry Regiment.

Training for military action took place at Burnham then at Trentham. We lived in tents at Trentham and the long route marches through the Hutt Valley were good for discipline and fitness. There were very few houses in the Hutt Valley then. On 17 April 1915 we embarked for service overseas and arrived in Egypt a few weeks later. We spent sometime training in Ismailia (between Cairo and near Port Said) but when we had leave we were free to explore Cairo and all the entertaining life there. It was all new and interesting to us.

Life back in camp was fairly boring and we had to entertain ourselves. On occasions we would get in to some mischief. There would be some drinking and the odd fisticuffs. Two up was a popular gambling game and I was very lucky at it. One time when the soldiers pay was late I offered to pay the company. Some knew I was flush and opportunists took advantage. There were no banks to rely on for security. But gambling was frowned upon and a few of us were caught and had to do a few days of field punishment.

The call to military action saw us landed on Gallipoli. The Canterbury Infantry Battalion followed the Australian Imperial Army troops. It was supposed to be a relatively easy landing on the beach to take ground and secure the Dardanelles Strait for our ships to attack the Turkish capital Constantinople (now Istanbul). But it was by no means easy and the Turks were able to force back the Allied warships.

The Gallipoli campaign was made more difficult because we were landed on the wrong beach and instead of seeing low level terrain ahead of us we saw cliffs that were well defended by the Ottoman Turk soldiers. Their machine gun fire took heavy toll of all the soldiers on the beach both Australian and New Zealand. The Turks were only defending their country and we would have done the same. The landing was a disaster. It was not only poorly planned and executed but the absence of effective leadership and good communication created considerable confusion.

I was one of the lucky ones to survive the landing and eventually we were able to make some progress, dig in and counter attack but there had been far too many casualties. We lost 2,721 men on Gallipoli. In all there were 130,000 fatalities on both sides. The Turks have been gracious in recognizing the role of Australia and New Zealand renaming the site where we landed as ANZAC Cove and where the ANZAC spirit was born.

The fighting on Gallipoli lasted eight months and I was there for almost six months. The conditions were terrible. We had to put up with heat, flies, lice and rats and the stench of human flesh was unforgettable. Most of us suffered from dysentery and hunger. The logistical support was woeful. Sometimes we had to eat seaweed just to keep going and we had to fight for our life as well. We were often low on ammunition.

The Turks used sharp nosed bullets. I was hit in the chest by one of them but it struck one of my tunic buttons and ricocheted off but I certainly felt the impact. That button was a life saver so I kept it on a bootlace which I took from the boot of a dead comrade who was lying near me. The button and bootlace were to be a lasting memento. (A Postcard dated 22/7/15 written in the trenches of Gallipoli and which was discovered in a collection many years later and advised to the family, referred to the button incident which happened that morning. The text of the Postcard is shown in Note **.

Some of the forward trenches of both the Turks and soldiers were very close. Once we were so short of ammunition I decided to sneak around their line and steal a box of theirs. It seemed a silly thing to do but it was a calculated risk, a choice between doing nothing and probably being killed or doing something about it. Luckily I got away with it

The trenches we fought from were quite deep and sometimes periscopes were used to peer over the top to see what was happening. One day I was using a periscope and my senior officer said that I would get a clearer idea if I poked my head up and looked around. At the time I told him I was not that "bloody inquisitive".

Those of us who survived Gallipoli were shipped off to France to enter the war on the Western Front at the Somme. We embarked on the "Caledonia" on 10 May 1916 arriving a short time later. Fighting the Germans at the Somme was tough and the conditions were very harsh made worse by the terrible weather and the gas. It was carnage. The German was a good soldier. On the odd occasion when there was a truce fighting stopped we would meet-up with our foes to sing and play a little football. But when it was over the soldiers of both sides went back to their lines and the war resumed.

I was wounded at Armentieres on 1 July 1916 and taken away for medical treatment but was able to rejoin my unit on 5 August. Another few weeks of warfare ensued before I was wounded again in the field on 23 September. This time it was a serious head wound. I was admitted to the General Hospital at Etaples a couple of days later and within a week was invalided out of the war aboard the "Brighton" bound for England. At least I was going to get home to see my sisters although it was not the way I had imagined. I remember while convalescing I got a free pass to visit Blenheim Castle and enjoyed the outing.

The type of treatment I needed meant going to hospital at Hampstead then to Walton, to Hornchurch and back to Walton again. The head injury required a metal plate to be inserted and nearly seven months after being admitted to Hampstead the first time I was deemed "no longer physically fit for war service on account of wounds received in action". On 4 May 1917 I was placed on the 'NZ Roll' and sent back to New Zealand from Plymouth aboard the "Arawa" on my birthday 19 May 1917. I was officially discharged from the Army on 22 October 1917.

Those who were involved in the war were given service medals. I received the Gallipoli Star, The British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Years later I was to receive a Gallipoli Commemorative medal and the medal given to all servicemen to commemorate the Royal Visit to New Zealand in 1953/54.

Looking back the war was a dreadful experience and the horrific images of it would never leave me. Sadly the wounds received in France affected me for the rest of my life. I was assessed as being eligible to receive a 100% disability war pension because of war wounds.

In due course I returned to Timaru, married Margaret Frewen and we had six children, four boys and two girls. I always hoped they would never have to go to war but two of the boys saw military service during the second World War. It was a worrying time for our family but thankfully the boys returned home safely. My wife Margaret was in the Red Cross for many years. She made dressing gowns and pyjamas on her treadle Singer sewing machine for the war effort. Eventually she was awarded a Gold Medal for fifty years of service to the Red Cross.

Our family lived in Livingston and Arthur Streets before we became the second family to occupy a new government house in the Marston Road housing area in 1938. I enjoyed gardening and always had a large vegetable garden. Sometimes I was able to deliver produce to old comrades

I would continue to meet my war mates at the RSA (Returned Services Association) where we would enjoy each others company over an ale or two. We did not talk much about our war experiences but we always remembered the mates who never came back and ANZAC days would always be a special time for us.

Alan died at Timaru in 1973.

Written by Alan's son Ezra and based on family knowledge, some as told by Alan, Alan's military record and ANZAC by Christopher Pugsley.

*Elsie's's daughter Ethyl married Noel Horsfield and they lived in Goole. Their only child Jean Hercus (Alan's great neice) now lives in Abingdon near Oxford and is in regular email contact with Ezra at Palmerston North.

^ A quid was common language for a pound, the equivalent of \$2.00.

The button and bootlace are now held in a collection with Alan's other World War 1 memorabilia.

** The postcard stated, 'I am very fortunate to get hold of this card but even if I had plenty we can't say much. I have been very lucky up to now only this morning I had a bullet went right through the top button of my tunic sleeve and only grazed my chest. We have had 6 weeks in the trenches. I tried to get hold of young Raddclif but in vain. All the boys seem fairly well and hope it will soon be over. I'll assure you I often think of you all. I am sure you don't forget me and my love to all of you. Alan'



Arthur Pratt
Boston 1940



Host
C. H. Pratt
Reception
and
Thanking

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Washington Empire Review

