



# Leopold Franklin (Bill) De Saxe Moruya's First ANZAC ?

By William Altmann

Leo (Bill) De Saxe who was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1893 was the son of Moruya's Dentist. At the age of 21 he was one of the first Moruya residents to volunteer and enlist in the "Australian Infantry Force", enlisting within a fortnight of World War I being declared. On the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, The Moruya Examiner <sup>(1)</sup> states that Bill had joined up and expected to leave with the first Expeditionary Force.



Bill's serial number was 320 and he enlisted on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1914.

At the time he was a bank clerk with the Bank of NSW. He was assigned to "B" company, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion and left Sydney on the HMAT Euripides on the 20<sup>th</sup> October of that year <sup>(2)</sup>.



Other Moruya men known to have joined around the same time were James Hume S No. 69 [KIA], Ethelbert (Bert) Jenner S

No.118, and Mervyn Johnston S No.254.

The following are extracts of statements made by Leo and contained in the book "The Boys Who Came Home. Recollections of Gallipoli" by Harvey Broadbent.

*"It was partly for King and country. I mean the media played, like they do today, a big part in it I mean they built you up to save the country, you know, and all that sort of thing. On the other hand, I mean there's a certain element of adventure mixed in with it ... I personally did [feel a close kinship with Britain]...I still do. When I hear this bloody Wran [Neville Wran Premier of New South Wales at the Time of interview] or someone coming out and saying we ought to be a republic, well I could just cut his bloody throat...I mean I have great admiration for Britain, a great admiration. I was six months there pretty near death in hospital, and I have great admiration for them... I've been sorry ever since that the British Empire crumbled...We hadn't reached that period in our nation here that we could call ourselves a nation...we hadn't reached that stage, [But] I was very proudly Australian, oh definitely, yes ... naturally, I mean, I don't know if I am prouder than anyone else, I mean I know there's another good saying, you know--- 'there's good and bad in every land' "* (page 2)

One must remember that when Leo grew up, the Defence Act 1903-11 required all medically fit boys from the age of 12 to 14 to participate in Junior Cadet force training at school.

Also that at schools at the start of the school week (some daily) it was custom to assemble at the school flagpole with the boys saluting and girls standing to attention, and face the Union Jack while it was raised and then with right hand on left breast to recite, "I love God and my Country, I honour the flag, I will serve the King, and cheerfully obey my parents, teachers and laws."

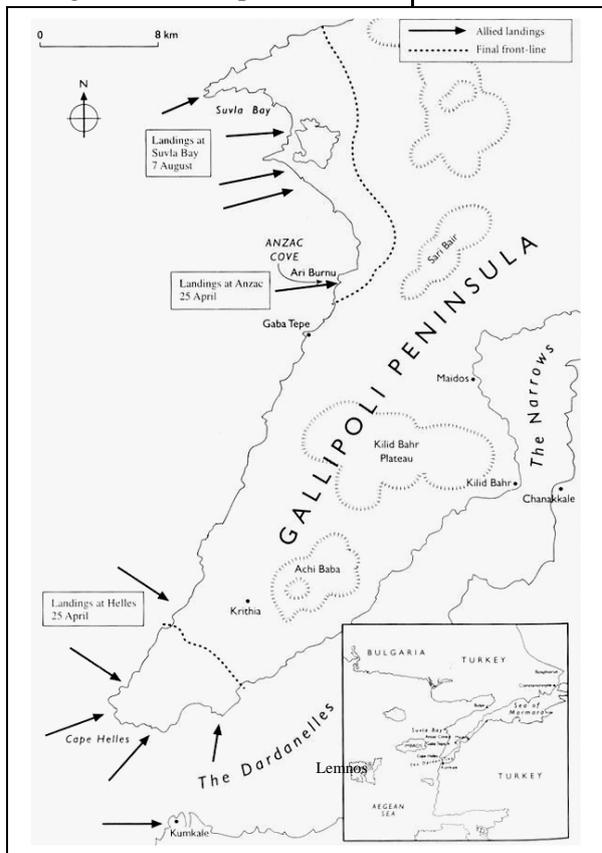
About his enlistment Leo states; "The medical examination was more severe than it was later, when they were glad to get any one in the army....I enlisted at Victoria Barracks. One line in the hall went that way, the other line for a medical check-up. In those days you had to be above five feet five. Well I was just on the bloody minimum, so I went up this line there, and I was rejected on account of my height, not medically but on account of my height. What I did, I walked right round to the other end of the other line, went up was passed through, in the one hall, in the one time... (page 12)

After training Leo was sent out from Australia on the first Convoy that sailed from Albany on the 1<sup>st</sup> November and disembarked at Alexandria Egypt on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1914. He was with the A&NZ Division which was sent to the Greek Island of Lemnos (just West of Gallipoli) in early April to prepare for the invasion of Turkey.

*"The Turkish aeroplanes used to come and fly over Lemnos and as a matter of interest a couple of us counted 110 transports or something in Lemnos Harbour. Well you could bet your life the Turks -- give 'em credit for a bit*

of bloody commonsense - they knew we weren't there for fun in Lemnos". (page 36)

Leo said this about the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1915.



"It was the most magnificent morning you could imagine, you couldn't imagine a more perfect morning as the morning we went ashore." (page 38)

"About three-quarters of a mile from shore, the HMS Bacchante



let go a salvo of 12-inch guns right over our heads as we rowed, and of course everybody nearly fell out of the bloody boat in fright. We were only about half a mile out when- Bang! A shell burst right in our boat--it was reputed to be a nose-cap of a French 75. Of course we were in the drink, and what a shemozzle! Trying to get my puttees and boots

off, and stay above water, you know. Luckily I was a good swimmer, but how many drowned around me I wouldn't know, but must have been a lot of them. A

naval pinnace came and hooked us out after about half an hour. They put a boathook round you and hauled you up on to the pinnace. And the place was a cauldron of bursting shells. The pinnace took us to a hospital ship, but the pinnace was hit and sunk along side the hospital ship! So, in the drink again! Then we had to climb up rope ladders up the side of the bloody ship....I lost my riffle pack and God knows what. And we had a medical examination and they reckoned I was suffering with shock and immersion. Later I was sent back with reinforcements...". (page 50)

The Moruya Examiner 1 May 1915 states, "NARROW ESCAPE.- In a letter from the front to his parents, Mr and Mrs C.De Saxe, says that during the landing at the Dardanelles, his mate was killed and the boat in which they were in, shot from under them. Leo escaped with slight injury to the knee. From the tone of the letter our brave soldier is evidently in the fighting line again. The address and parts of the letter were censored". The next news to appear in the paper was on the 12<sup>th</sup> June, "FROM GALLIPOLI. - His parents have received a letter from Private Leo De Saxe written in the

trenches at Gallipoli, 150 yards from the Turkish trenches. He says he is well and everything is quiet".

"Ted Mudge was down at the beach in the hospital tent with severe dysentery or diarrhea ...Well, he'd have a go at anything, wouldn't matter how big a brawl, and he could fight a bit too... And when the Turks were attacking on 19 May he left hospital tent of his own volition and went up to the trenches....He climbed up on the parapet with his gun and he is firing with no protection at all, and that's when he was killed, of course." (page 73) [This event took place in the Quinn's post area]

June

"I used to see them carrying men away from various parts of the line on stretchers. One night they put us on guard to stop anyone leaving the front line. One of the boys had been killed during the night and they put him on the side of this path and said 'Oh well, he'll be buried in the morning', and here is this cove says to this bloke on the stretcher, 'What you cop some?' "And when he found he was dead, he walked right around him. That's superstition, the sort of nervous reactions that took place"...(page 81).

"They had night raids, Major Leckey of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion knew me - I worked with him at the Bank of New South Wales. To get volunteers - it was voluntary - he came along and said, 'What about you coming on the night run Bill?' I said, 'Why pick me? I'm no bloody hero, I don't go on the night raid'. You had no ammunition, no nothing - just a trenching tool, that's the only protection you had. I wouldn't be in it. You see, they were getting nowhere, and I wanted to come back to Australia. I didn't want to be buried over there if I could help it." (page 90) [some time in July]

Leo reflects on the landing of the British at Suvla Bay about the 6<sup>th</sup> August and their attitude about digging themselves in. That failed August offensive cost 22,000 dead and wounded

*"They were territorial regiments, not regulars...They weren't trained...and they wouldn't dig--they built little shallow trenches, little protection at all-- the Australians couldn't get deep enough down in the bloody earth to get out of the road".* (page 106)

The evacuation from Gallipoli took place on the nights of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> November

Leo states in the postscripts of the book;

*"I wasn't a hero. It was just a case of--you made friends and mates while you were training and you wanted to join them. Not from any heroism. Don't put me down as that, for god's sake, I'm no bloody hero."*

Leo returned to Australia on the 12/12/1915 <sup>(3)</sup>

Leo was accorded a welcome home social at the Moruya Mechanics Institute on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1916 <sup>(4)</sup>

On page 126 there is a little poem

*"What gone? The Australians gone!  
From Anzac gone?  
The lurid crater where eight long months,  
They livid with death, dined with disease,  
Til one in every two fell ill and one  
In every four was shot and one  
In every eight lay dead  
Yes gone! From Anzac gone!  
And left behind eight thousand graves*

A final reference is made <sup>(5)</sup> in that Bill had been recuperating in New Zealand and had been home for a short visit before returning to banking duties

Leopold (Bill) De Saxe was discharged on medical grounds from the Australian Infantry Expeditionary Force on the 23<sup>rd</sup>

March 1916 having served 238 days overseas and a total of 1 year and 107 days

Leo during his teen years was awarded a "The Royal Shipwreck Relief and Humane Society of NSW Award " for jumping in the water at the Moruya Wharf to save life of a young boy who had fallen into the water on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1905, the Moruya Examiner <sup>(5)</sup> reported *"A BRAVE LAD--On Saturday morning while engaged with other boys fishing at Coomonderry's wharf young Eddie, son of Constable Lawrence overbalanced and fell into the river. Not being able to swim the lad sank, the water very deep at the spot when Leo De Saxe a lad only 12 years, jumped in clothes and all, and as young Lawrence rose to the surface De Saxe seized him by the shoulder and succeeded in bringing him to shore. Young Leo who is a son of Mr C. De Saxe, of this town is a good swimmer, but the pluck displayed in risking his life to save a comrade by a youth of sub*



*tender years stamps him a brave lad; and his heroic action is deserving of the highest recognition by the Humane Society".*

(Commanderry's wharf was situated at the mouth of Ryan's Creek/Moruya River)

Leo retired as a Bank Manager and passed away peacefully in 1988, His daughter donated his war and bravery medals to the Moruya and District Historical Society where they are on display.



### Bibliography;

Extracts from, "The Boys Who Came Home" by H. Broadbent. An ABC Book.

- (1) Moruya Examiner 15<sup>th</sup> August 1914
- (2) AWM Microfiche Records
- (3) Moruya Examiner 12<sup>th</sup> February 1916
- (4) Moruya Examiner 20<sup>th</sup> May 1916
- (5) Moruya Examiner 21<sup>st</sup> April 1905

### Answers to the crossword

**Across** 1. Busybodies. 7. Roy. 8. Drawbridge. 9. Lair. 10. Stoutly. 11. Tide. 13. Ashore. 16. Heelers. 17. Brave. 18. Eva. 19. Score. 21. Sarong. 22. Time.

**Down** 1. Bodalla Cheese. 2. Star in the East. 3. Babe. 4. Drifts. 5. Eggcups. 6. Moruya River. 12. Diehard. 14. Haricot. 15. Island. 20. Eve.