

ARTHUR CLARENCE NEALE M M.



A memoir written by the nephew who never met him.
Neale E Bavington

Arthur was one of the famous “Thirty Cousins” of the Neale family which was centred on Colac in the Victorian Western District. In fact, there were thirty-six cousins at least who were the grandchildren of the pioneers, James Neale and Jane Maria Whitby. His father Henry Kerrison Neale was their sixth child and he married Elizabeth (Lizzie) Gee. They were a small family by the standards of the time with three children, Arthur Clarence, Elsie May Beatrice, and Edith Mary.

The news of the developing arms race was slow to come to Colac and indeed to Australia. The people really woke up to the situation when the Leader of the Opposition came to town. The ringing oratory of Andrew Fisher moved everyone present including Arthur. The crowd went wild when he declared that “Australians will stand beside the Mother Country to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling”. The packed meeting was held on 31 July 1914, War was declared on 4th August 1914 and Fisher won the election and his ALP swept into power on 5th September 1914. Australia was committed to the war.

The young men were thrilled at the thought of the adventure ahead, there was to be travel overseas, new lands and sights, not to mention an escape from milking the cows. Arthur gave little thought to the perils ahead. In fact, his main thought was how do I, as an only son, get away to war? He knew he would face resistance although as he was over 21, he could enlist. Events seemed to speed up with the Declaration of War and the firing of the first shot. Amazing as it may seem the press reported that the first shot of World War 1 was fired in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia some 17,000 miles away from Europe.

The British Admiralty was committed to the latest state of art and technological development, which was the radio. The Admiralty advised its Senior Commanders of the Declaration of War at midnight GMT. The Admiral in Hong Kong received the message and passed it to his Squadron Commanders simply assuming that the Australian and New Zealand Squadrons were his to command. His orders required the arrest of all German shipping and the prompt organisation of Naval and Military Expeditionary Forces to capture the Kaiser's radio stations at Rabaul in German New Guinea and at Apia in Samoa. On that day there was a German ship, the SS PFALZ in Melbourne about to sail. The ship got underway as news of the Declaration became known, the ship was well down Port Phillip Bay and within 45 minutes of escaping through the Heads when the shot across her bows rang out. It was fine work by the Australian Gunners. The time was 3am Greenwich Mean Time and 12.45pm Australian Eastern Standard Time on the 5th August 1914. The SS PFALZ, her Captain and crew returned to Melbourne, captives for the duration of the war. Australia and Colac were on fire with war fever. Enlistments commenced on 11th August 1914.

Arthur struggled on with the wish to enlist knowing that his family would be left in difficulty. At last, he had the support of his two sisters, and he was enlisted on 3rd April 1915 at Warrion when he took the oath to "well and truly serve his Sovereign Lord and King for the duration of the war". He had his medical at Geelong on 27th March 1915. He was conscious that Colonel Monash had formed Four Brigade and sailed to Egypt in 1914, but he knew nothing of plans to land at Gallipoli on 25th April 1915. He was allocated to C Company 24 Battalion with the number 744 but like many, he was anxious that the war would be over before he got to it. He caught the train from Colac admiring the decorations on the engine. Several young ladies kissed the new soldiers and there was an immediate mateship as soldiers introduced themselves to each other. Someone had a stick of chalk and wrote "Berlin Here We Come" on the carriage. The new recruits spilled out of the train at Spencer Street Station and then they walked to St Kilda Road to the bluestone Victoria Barracks where the staff sorted them into companies. The 24th Battalion was planned to be sourced from several states, but the Victorians arrived in such numbers that they provided over 1000 men for a monster Battalion. Then they started the ten-mile march to the Broadmeadows Camp in their civilian clothes, some carried a suitcase or a brown paper parcel with their possessions and Arthur had a Gladstone bag. Their marching was not particularly soldierly.

The Broadmeadows Camp was hastily set up on land given by a patriotic Australian. It was to be the home of the 21st, 22nd and 24th Battalions and the 18th Light Horse. Thousands of men arrived to receive uniforms, in the open air, as well as their bayonets and the .303 Lee Enfield rifle. Arthur got a new razor, brushes and boots but was grateful for the two pairs of khaki socks knitted by his family together with a knitted face washer and scarf. Tents designed for four soon housed six and then eight soldiers. The Camp was a disgrace by 1915 with poor drainage and serious levels of dysentery. It was soon to be closed but for the 24th Battalion they slept on the ground as duckboards had not arrived. For the evening meal the Sergeants threw two loaves of bread and one tin of jam into the tents for eight men. Bayonets opened the jam but proved to be inadequate bread knives. Many Officers and some soldiers preferred to go into Melbourne for dinner. Sadly, Arthur did not have the money, he stayed in Camp and used his issue "hussiff" (the soldiers name for his "housewife"), a cloth roll

containing needles and thread to sew his Colour Patch of the Red and White Diamond on his uniform. It was fortunate that he had brought some food to share. His Gladstone bag and all the suitcases with their civilian clothes just disappeared into an Army store and were never seen again. He had his photograph taken and it reveals that his country could not even supply the Rising Sun badges for his collars and even his cap.

The 24th Battalion made unfortunate history when it was embarked after only seven days training. Some historians see it as a criminal act by the Australian Government and Army, perhaps they hoped there would be training time in Egypt although there could be no guarantee. Never before nor since has an Australian Battalion been embarked with such inadequate training. No one had fired his weapon on the range. Arthur had hoped to sail on the SS PFALZ which was now in Australian service humiliating the Kaiser. The 24 and 23 Battalions sailed on the "EURIPEDIES" while his cousin Charles James Neale sailed with his 21st and the 22nd Battalions on board "ULYSSES" on Sat. 8th May 1915. The hammocks were impossible, crowding was extreme, and the animals suffered during the trip. The Navy galleys were inadequate, so the cooks set up a row of coppers on deck and lit fires under each one. Rabbits were thrown into the boiling "soup" and after a few minutes hundreds of eyes floated to the surface in the scum. The ration was four men to a rabbit plus several eyes. Arthur did see one cook scoop off a colander of eyes and toss them overboard but that was unusual. Most city boys and some country lads swore that they would never eat rabbit again.

One member of the Battalion died in Melbourne just prior to embarkation. They stopped at Albany WA, and this was to be their last look at Australia. From there they headed to Colombo (Ceylon now Sri Lanka) where they buried two dead who followed the six buried at sea, the first nine casualties of the 24 Battalion even before reaching Egypt. The troops wished to visit Colombo but were denied leave and they responded by going overboard, an officer drew his pistol, and it seems to have also gone overboard. Then leave was granted. Arthur enjoyed the shipboard games of quoits, tug of war and two-up as well as the visit ashore to a very different civilisation. He learnt a new word 'FURPHIES' best described as soldier's gossip named after a family of ironmongers from Ballarat who produced water carts with an iron water tank bearing their name. Soldiers gathered at the water point and exchanged rumours.

Egypt was warm and exotic. The Pyramids were just near the camp and camels strolled nearby. The 24th Battalion saw their first Hospital Trains laden with hundreds of wounded and dying soldiers, it was a shocking sight to see so many returning from the fighting. The soldier from Colac was astonished and threw himself into the training although he had a chance to visit the markets. A few men were found to be unsuitable and were sent home and the Battalion's numbers settled on 1,063. As shooting on the range commenced Arthur thought of his mother, the redoubtable Lizzie Neale. She was not to be argued with and certainly her husband Henry Kerrison Neale, her only son Arthur Clarence Neale and her only grandson Neale Edmund Bavington would never have thought to question her. So, when she ordered a pair of rabbits it was understood without question that she was not a lady to serve bruised meat. Trapping, dogs or ferrets were not possible. All three generations knew a head shot was required.

Arthur's skill paid off. Out of the Battalion about 200 men could only hit the target at 100 yards, 600 could hit it at 200 yards and 200 could reach 300 yards. The most elite could hit the target at 500 yards, some even able to choose a chest or head shot. From these the Commanding Officer selected his ten Marksmen (one per 100 men) and awarded them a small badge of crossed rifles. Arthur was an elite shot; the rabbits had helped, as well as the Warrion Sparrow Shoots. Marksmen had the right to first choice from all the rifles and had immediate access to the Regimental Artificer who was a skilled mechanic to adjust sights. Arthur bought a set of small screwdrivers in the market so that he could adjust his rifle and was excused from taking his rifle on parade as even the slap of a Salute or Present Arms would affect his sights. Every soldier respected the marksmen.

On 29th August 1915 they caught the train from Helmhah to Alexandria and then joined the "NILE" which was accompanied by the "SOUTHLAND". The Germans were ahead of the Allies in many types of armaments and there was a real fear of submarines as the two ships headed to the Greek Island of Lemnos. The 24th Battalion landed 30 Officers and 991 Other Ranks at Lemnos at 8.30am on 2nd September 1915 but the torpedoed "SOUTHLAND" sank with the Brigade and Divisional Staff and the 21st Battalion. Some were saved but it was not a good start. From there to Gallipoli there was an introduction to Turkish fire and an introduction to the trenches of Lone Pine where the 24th and 22nd Battalions were to take it in turns to defend the line.

It is possible even 100 years later to trace the Australian and Turkish trenches at Lone Pine. In some places they are so close a fit man could jump from one to the other. No one did that but in other areas there was a wide "no mans land" which was covered in barbed wire. Much of the work was digging to try to get below the enemy trench and then to break into it from below, it was desperate work. The longest tunnel or mine dug by the 24th was 400 yards. Arthur felt he did some of his best work as a marksman at Lone Pine. He had first to manage the "Military Periscope" which was a narrow box with two mirrors. The soldier could remain below the edge of the trench and by looking at the lower mirror could see the view of no man's land from the upper mirror. His periscope was frequently shot to pieces by the Turks, making useful kindling!

The trenches were horrible, hot, rat and lice infected with the stench of sanitation and of the dead, both ours and theirs. It takes some time to get used to eating the evening meal with three or four of the day's dead just a few feet away, and it was quite likely that one of them would have had his head blown off. In the evenings many Turks would climb above their trenches to get some cool air and avoid the stench. Even the Turkish Commander Kemal Ataturk was known to do this to enjoy an evening cigarette, almost all Turks smoked. Marksmen are distinguished by their shooting skills but also by their patience. He waited until the Turk took a puff. Arthur's skill was to calculate the distance from the slightly brighter red glow of the cigarette to the man's brain as the Turk drew the smoke into his lungs. For him, it was not enough to see the cigarette in the dark, he needed to calculate where the brain would be. The Turkish monuments on Gallipoli are often seen as severe but to them it a place to offer thanks for those Martyrs who fought the Jihad to destroy the invaders. There is in one memorial hall a pile of skulls of Turkish heroes each punctured with a single Australian bullet, possibly some fired by Arthur.

The position at Lone Pine was held with considerable losses as the Turks mounted one attack after another. In total the Turks attacked 20 times. They were determined to capture what had previously been their lines. Senior officers made their reports and Lord Kitchener visited the peninsula on the 13th November 1915 to agree to the ANZACS leaving. Australian troops at Lone Pine massed around him to cheer and they took him to 30 yards from the Turkish trenches. The withdrawal was being planned during a very bitter winter. Arthur saw his first snow on 27th November 1915 when men started to die, they were simply frozen to death. On the 29th November the 23rd and 24th Battalions suffered heavy casualties in the last major action on Lone Pine. The Battalion received a very large Artillery shell and despite a major search they could find nothing of a soldier. It was a sign that the Kaiser had been able to get Heavy Artillery to the Sultan. For the Battalion to escape it was essential that the Turks had no idea of the withdrawal, so the rate of fire had to be kept at a usual frequency with far fewer troops.

Arthur had ideas: of all the jobs on the farm the worst was lambing season. It meant sleeping out during winter to deter the foxes, this was before alpacas and maramba dogs acted as protectors and there were no effective spotlights for shooting at the distinctive green eyes of the fox. The Neale boys fixed a shotgun to the top of the stonewall common in the Warrion/Colac area and aimed it along the top of the wall to avoid hitting any ewe. Cans of water with a small hole were fitted and dripped into a lower can that was connected to the trigger. The weight of the lower can caused the gun to fire. Experimentation with the size of the drip hole gave remarkably accurate timing of the firing. This invention of the “drip rifle” saved many Australian lives. Some members of 24th Battalion felt Arthur should receive a decoration for his invention, but he never grumbled that a high decoration was given to a soldier in another unit for the invention. By this time Arthur was crippled with frostbite and in need of hospitalisation. He pulled on his last home knitted socks over his boots to muffle the sound of movement. Others who had no socks used their underwear or rags to kill the noise. They moved along lines of whitening along the old goat tracks to the shore. At 2.30 am the Battalion made its way down from Lone Pine in silence with some being carried, some were shoved along, and a few may have been kicked to keep them moving. They were emaciated exhausted sick men. Arthur left Gallipoli as one of the 46 living men of the 24th Battalion, they left behind 1,000 dead. Remarkably those few men brought back a pinecone from the famous “Lonesome Pine” later named the Lone Pine. That pinecone is now on display at the Australian War Memorial in the diorama celebrating the 24th Battalion.

The 24th slowly recovered as new reinforcements arrived. It takes time to rebuild a Battalion of less than 50 up to 1000. The “furphies” flew around widely. They were to garrison Egypt, they were to go to India, they were to protect the Suez Canal or fight the Turk in Mesopotamia. Eventually it became clear that they were to fight the Hun on the Western Front. They sailed through the Mediterranean to Marseilles and Arthur was surprised that on the ship he was called “Poppy”. This has no reference to the flower, but it was, and still is, a term of respect for a senior experienced soldier to be called “Pop” or “Poppy”. Arthur now wore a cloth “A” for ANZAC on his uniform. He had reached the stage where young soldiers sought his advice on many matters and where he saved more than one green subaltern from making a significant mistake.

From the southern port they caught a train to travel to northern France. The General Staff made sure they did not go into the capital in case the pleasures of “Gay Paree” should seduce the Diggers. The Diggers were cheered at every town and village as they travelled north. He was to enter the trenches at FLEURBAIX where the 24th was first gassed, Arthur got new orders. “If you see a German soldier with a gas bottle, do not shoot him, aim for the gas but make sure the wind is not coming our way.” In May 1916 he took part in a great raid at the ARMENTIERES sector. Commanding Officers have always had the duty to launch patrols of two types in no-mans-land. The fighting patrol of up to 40 men would fight to gain a prisoner or to cause enemy reaction so that their location, strength and weaponry were revealed. The reconnaissance patrol was much smaller and moved quietly to observe enemy operations and hopefully could report back without coming under fire. The great raid was a new experiment and was different. It consisted of hundreds of men, often the very best from three Battalions who launched a shock attack into the enemy’s position. It was a complex operation involving Artillery and sometimes Air power. The real difficulty was the extrication phase when the Australians sought to disengage and return to their positions. Arthur’s work during the great raid was recorded in his official records.

The War on the Western Front was very different from that of Gallipoli. They were in the middle of the French or Belgian populations. There were times when the 24th Battalion was withdrawn from the line, and it was possible to visit a village or town. Arthur tried the “vin blanc” (local white wine) which the Diggers called “Plonk”. There was also the “widow” (Verve Cliquot) a champagne produced by the Widow Cliquot. Most Diggers longed for Australian beer or stuck to tea, thankful that here in France, milk was available unlike in Turkey. Arthur had been able to send some presents home from Egypt mainly trinkets, coins and the mosaic boxes still available in Cairo markets. He entered a ladies’ shop in Armentieres and purchased scarves for his sisters for Christmas as well as examples of lace for his Mother. Then as the snow was falling, he took the plunge and bought a long white nightgown with hood in the French style for himself! He was not alone as the 24th found that their government had made no provision for winter white coveralls. Soldiers were expected to cross snowfields wearing dark khaki uniforms, a complete absurdity making them an obvious target. The night gowns saved lives.

On the SOMME he fought at POZIERS and MOUQUET FARM where he was wounded. Mouquet Farm was simply the most difficult place to conquer. The Canadians had more than one go. The same was true of both the British and Australians. It was absolute heart break territory and the Germans had riddled the area with tunnels. Even today there are major Military Academies that study Mouquet Farm always seeking better answers. Of course, Field Marshall Earl Haig was right. If the Kaiser ran out of fit young men before the Allies, then he lost the War. Battalion after Battalion, Division after Division were fed into the furnace of death. Even a Division of 20,000 men could be killed in a morning and they were then replaced by another Division who were to follow the exact orders with similar results of gaining a few yards. Once again the 24th was reduced to about 50 men, Arthur’s good work was noted on his file.

Later he took part in operations at FLERS, BAPAUME, GREVILLIERS, BULLECOURT, PASCHENDALE AND BROODSEINDE. At Bullecourt the 24th Battalion was present for one day, they lost 80% of the Battalion on 3 May 1917.

At one time the very depleted 24th received 200 reinforcements who were hurried into the line. Some were dead before their Platoon Commander could enter their name in the roll book. Arthur's health had recovered, and he was very fit. In his earlier days he had been a competent sprinter taking part in several Gifts. These foot races were held in most country towns and today it is only the Stawell Gift that reminds us of their former popularity. He volunteered to be a "Runner". On the Western Front it was virtually a suicidal mission. The German artillery and mortars quickly destroyed the communication signal wires that were laid from a Headquarters to its units. The only answer was for a Runner to spring out of their trench, run rapidly in a zigzag course and throw themselves into another trench at speed. The Germans would throw everything they could at the Runner: Rifle fire, Machine gun fire and Mortar bombs all aimed to prevent the Runner delivering his message.

Arthur Clarence Neale was awarded the Military Medal by His Majesty King George V on the recommendation of his Brigade and Divisional Commanders. His citation reads:

For conspicuous gallantry in advance on BROODSEINE RIDGE on 4/10/17. This runner went forward with the Advance Command Post party and fearlessly carried messages under heavy shell fire a distance of 700 yards to the C.O. In a later run en route between Coys, he met another wounded runner, took the important message and personally at great personal risk through heavy enemy fire succeeded in delivering it. His cheerfulness was marked and influenced many about him to greater efforts.



That dash of 700 yards must have been a record let alone the delivery of the second message from the wounded Runner. It was a miracle he lived and yet his cheerfulness drew a positive comment from his Commanders. There are several Unit Histories where soldiers have expressed the view that of all the members of a Battalion the most respected were the Runners for their bravery and athleticism followed by the Marksmen for their remarkable skill. Arthur was both!

The 24th Battalion was again in a desperate position. It was clear that reinforcements were not arriving to rebuild the unit. Arthur and all the others suddenly received their voting papers. It was the Conscription Vote of 20th December 1917; we do not know how Arthur voted but overall, the Battalion and the AIF voted against conscription. The Neale girls at home set out to get more men enlisted to rebuild the serving units. They joined the White Feather movement, collected the small feathers, an accusation of cowardice, and placed them in envelopes. These were handed to any fit young man they met. The leader of the Anti-Conscription movement was the Irish Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne Daniel Mannix who even today is seen as a hero by some of his community. He is the man who kept “our boys out of the War”. The Neale girls travelled to the Catholic towns and villages to shame men into enlisting. Their efforts were not particularly successful, but it was clear the German forces were hurting.

Arthur did tell the story of one of his runs. Evidently the fire from the Germans was massive. Like most Runners he had no idea of what trenches or shell holes were on the route, so he flung himself into a narrow slit trench he spotted. He said he knew what it was as he swept the log across aside. Yes, it was a latrine, the log was called a “grunt pole” by soldiers. When he reported to his Officer he was instructed, “Go and wash yourself in the Mediterranean!” Arthur’s only comment was that the current lot of Officers were an uneducated bunch as everyone knew the Channel and the Atlantic were much closer.

While the soldiers continued their battles, there were other developments in Europe that the diggers had little idea of. In faraway Russia, the Czar was removed from his throne by his rebelling sailors and soldiers. Lenin and the Bolsheviks had the Royal Family shot and thrown down a well. What Arthur and the men of the 24th did not know was that these events meant the Kaiser was now free to move 50 Divisions across to the Western Front. So, there were an extra million German soldiers about to attack the defensive line, it was to be their last great Spring offensive. They were moved rapidly by trains, rekkitted and sorted into four huge attack formations. By a miracle, the line held but it was dented in places. Where the Germans gained ground, it did not advantage them. Arthur noted the growing number of German prisoners of war. Frequently those prisoners were very young country boys whose morale sunk as they found that in captured British trenches there was plenty of sugar and even white bread. The Kaiser did not gain for all his 4000 Artillery guns and the massive railway guns that slaughtered the 24th Battalion. Arthur now found himself as a guard of prisoners and to his surprise his task was not to stop them running away, let alone capturing his weapon, it was to stop the French civilians from hanging or incinerating the enemy soldiers.



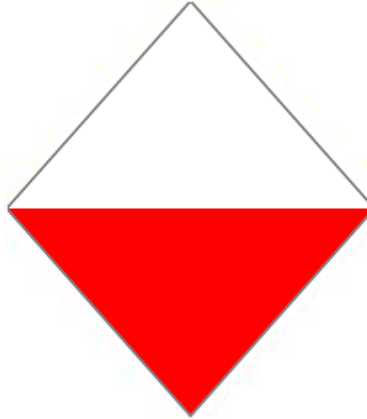
Arthur's letters had become solemn, almost melancholic. There was a feeling that his luck must run out. He no longer wrote about his mates, perhaps they were all dead or maybe so wounded that they were repatriated home. His wounds affected him, and he was very sick but there was just the feeling that the War had gone on too long together with a degree of Survivor's Guilt. As an original, he battled on to teach young reinforcements with Regimental Numbers in the 6,000s and perhaps he felt that he could not become their friend as their life would be short. Everyone was simply exhausted. He heard about the Armistice of the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month (11am, 11th November 1918) on his way home to Australia. His thoughts were for those unfortunates who died in the last week when it was known that the date of Peace was determined.

He had left England on 19th October 1918 on the Ship SARDINIA arriving in Australia on 27th December 1918. The journey could well have been described as a journey to hell. The conditions the heroes suffered were disgusting, survivors forced an inquiry. Men who just needed peace and quiet were harassed. There was limited understanding of mental health let alone shellshock or post-traumatic stress. Those in command were condemned on a number of issues including "Officers having no interest in the men", poor food, lack of discipline, gambling, drunkenness, poor health and medical operations. The influenza spread, men died and those who were ill lay unattended.

Staggering as it may sound Arthur was to suffer even more when he was lodged at the MacLeod Sanatorium outside Melbourne. It was another hell in some ways worse than the SARDINIA. The neglect and lack of sympathy again caused an inquiry that was equally damning. Plague became Flu, there was no plan so it became Tuberculous or Pleurisy, the food was unsatisfactory, and the bedding was unclean. Some Officers pronounced the place to be adequate but major change did not happen until after the unplanned visit of the Prince of Wales, too late to assist Arthur. The soldiers were forgotten as the community celebrated the Victory and Peace.

Arthur was visited by his sisters and his Father who held him as he died on 10th May 1919. Arthur was never able to return to his beloved village of Warrion and his sisters who worshipped him were devastated by his appearance, staff prevented them from holding his hand. It was a very long time since his enlistment in the 24th Battalion on

3rd April 1915 and what a sad end to the life of a courageous soldier.



Arthur is honoured by the Australian War Memorial and at memorials at Warrion, Elliminyt and at Colac. His family buried him at the Colac Cemetery where he was later joined by his Father Henry (d. 26 Nov 1932) and his Mother Elizabeth (d. 3 Feb 1953). His two sisters mourned him until their death, fortunately both found husbands who were hardworking and sober. Elsie married Arthur Bavington and Edith (Jo) married Len Marriner. His death is recorded in the Official History of the 24th Battalion as being “On active Service”.