

ANZAC Centenary Project Interview on 25 July 2014 at the H J Daley Library between Denise Moses and Lauren Willard

AA Can I start with both of your names please?

DM My name is Denise Eleanor Moses and I live in Campbelltown. I am Lauren Gwendolyn Mary Willard and I live in Bradbury.

AA Can I have the name of the person that we are going to be talking about today?

DM Alfred William Ernest Wright.

AA What relation was he to you both?

DM He was our grandfather. We are first cousins.

AA Can you tell me what his connection with Campbelltown is?

LW He was in both World Wars and both times he was in Ingleburn Army Camp. The first time he was from Lidcombe and the second time from Botany, but both times he ended up at Ingleburn.

AA Did you know him quite well? Did he talk much about Ingleburn Army Camp?

LW I got taken to Ingleburn Army Camp when I was barely 2 years old and I was born in 1951. There was no reason for my grandfather to be there other than to show me Ingleburn Army Camp. When I joined the CMF when I was 18, I visited Concord Hospital regularly once a month and on one occasion I visited Ingleburn Army Hospital for the weekend.

AA Which wars did he serve in?

LW The First World War where he received the Military Medal and the Second World War where he got to the rank of Warrant Officer.

AA I know it happened, but it was pretty unusual to serve in both World Wars.

LW From his enlistment papers, in the First World War his age was put up, in the Second World War his age was put down.

AA Do you know when he was born?

LW Yes 14 December 1897. He was sent home from the First World War, he was shot in the upper right arm, and I think that was when he ended up in

Ingleburn Army Hospital. He eventually lost complete use of that right arm. That condition existed when he went to the Second World War. He could not fully use his right hand; he had to learn to write by his left hand. You can see the enlistment signatures have changed from the First World War when he was naturally right handed.

He joined the Militia between the wars and he learnt to write left handed and he could pull the rifles that they used apart very quickly and assemble them very quickly. He showed the young men in the Second World War how to clean their guns and keep them functioning with only the use of his left arm. We never knew him with the use of his right hand. By the time I knew him, his hand was clawed up which apparently was the condition it was in the Second World War. According to his wife my Nanna he never should have gone overseas because he was disabled.

AA So he was known as Alf. He was in the 20th Battalion is that right?

DM Alfred William Earnest.

5 mins

LW Yes it was pretty full on fighting. It is all information we have gained since. We both have interest in the history of the First World War. You couldn't get much out of my grandfather. I remember standing in the War Memorial with him once looking at a diorama of the trenches, and I never knew my Grandfather to show a lot of emotion but he had tears and the only thing he ever said to me was you can't smell it, you can't know what it's like, I had asked him wasn't it a good representation and he said no you can't feel the wet, you can't smell the smell. He said no, I'll never forget it.

AA Which Battlefield was he on, where did he see Service in the First World War?

LW He landed in Lagnicourt in France where he got the military medal and that was on the 25th April, 1916. He was 18 years old, he wasn't 19 yet and he took a German gunning placement and took it single handed, held it, stopped the firing of the Germans and returned fire using their own weapon which saved quite a few lives. On the day he won it, 3 VC's were won and we were told quiet firmly that they weren't going to make it number 4.

DM They just couldn't make it 4 VC's on one day.

LW So it was a pretty hectic battle if there were 3 VC's awarded. That's not where he was shot either; he was shot later in another skirmish.

AA You said he also served at Pozières?

LW And I'm going to say Ypres, my Grandfather always said Ypres which is in Belgium. So he served both in France and Belgium and he has, he never

looked after them but these were put aside, citations from the Belguim... these were screwed up and not looked after and I probably rescued them from being thrown out after my Grandfather passed away. My grandmother had a pin that had belonged to her mother in law that was given to women whose sons or husbands had served at Ypres and my great grandmother apparently wore it the whole time from when she was awarded it. The interesting part about her is she was German so several members of her family had been interned and my Grandfather had been told he was disowned and was not one of the uncles nephews anymore because he fought against the Germans. His father was English so he could have fought on both sides when you think about it.

DM It did cause a lot of disruption among the family at the time having a German background and having to make a choice. I don't think he thought it was a choice, he felt that was how it was.

LW He was a country boy but was never taught to use a gun and when he came to the city at 14 he worked at Murray Brothers at Parramatta which was a department store really and by the time he left he owned his own business at 16, it was a little grocery shop.

10 mins

AA Which country town did he come from?

LW He was born in Louth, birth registered in Cobar. When he was 11 they moved into Cobar and he first went to school at 11 and by the time he was 14 they were in Sydney. So he didn't go to school for very long.

AA How do you say the town name?

LW Louth, it's on the Darling. Its named after the Irish Town or County

AA So very different than the Country he fought in, a very different countryside.

LW Absolutely

AA Did he march on Anzac Day?

DM Oh yes, twice, he never missed it. He would go round with the First World War and then pick up the second and go round again.

LW And when we were young he did the full two marches and as the numbers of participants went down lower and lower he'd have to leave the First World War at the corner of Bathurst and George Street where we waited every year to watch him march past and leave with us and not go the rest to Hyde Park and run back and join the Second Second. So yes he marched, it was religion, he never missed it.

AA It's funny isn't it, it was common to nearly all of them, none of them would talk about the war but all of them would march on Anzac Day.

LW Yes and the only time I saw my Grandfather was emotional was when they'd see they had lost a few men during the year and he mostly knew because they had their association books and if they started talking about someone that had gone during the year, it was really hard for him to let go of those people, he was very much connected and even as a young child, with his Second World War, my Grandmother had sewing afternoons which nobody does now, but she was always the oldest member because it was all servicemen from the Second World War and their wives and I remember them as much as I do relatives, they were part of our family. Whether with the Second World War as my Grandfather said, they were his boys he'd been through a war and he was preparing his boys and maybe he did feel towards them like they were sons. And they being the Second Second, the second battalion were from the far north coast so he met boys from Newcastle. He just never really talked about the wars either way.

AA So not either War?

LW No, until quite late he was becoming a little demented and my son who was born in '73, looked like a mini me to my Grandfather and one afternoon, because he'd lived with us for the last 3 years and one afternoon my mother was out on the back veranda I went out to talk to her and she said shhh and Poppa was talking to David who was five and telling him stories from the War that no one had ever heard. My son went to school the next day and said to one of the Turkish students, because we lived at Merrylands, do you know my great Grandfather got paid for shooting your great Grandfather.

15 mins

LW So obviously, he couldn't take in the circumstances of the War because he was five he knew that Poppa fought the Turks and we found out later, that no, Poppa didn't go to Gallipoli, he couldn't have he was a replacement but it was transferred memories that he went into an old Battalion, the 20th Battalion was at Gallipoli.

DM It was, it was stationed off Gallipoli waiting to disembark and I think they turned those ships around and that's where those guys went to Fromelles.

LW So he would have transferred a lot of those memories and what he was saying was pretty horrific he was talking about days when they had a cease fire, because they had to have cease fires because of the heat and the smell and he said that they were picking up bodies and green liquid would float out of the bodies and obviously he hadn't been there but his knowledge of being there was first hand.

DM And maybe it got cross remembered.

LW And he would talk about the trenches and the rats coming out of the remains of other men and it wasn't uncommon for the men to grab other men's grey coats because they were shot and they weren't going to need it and the other was alive and were going to need it. So some of the memories he had were of his actual battles and the Gallipoli memories were as if he was reporting from that time.

DM We still don't know for 100% sure whether he was there or whether he wasn't, I guess there are ways to find out.

LW Because the 20th Battalion had been there.

DM In fact I think the 20th Battalion were the last ones off

AA No wonder they didn't want to talk about it.

LW Though he did talk about the light side of exchanging Turkish cigarettes, that sort of thing did go on during cease fires and he said you had to have the cease fires because of the smell, neither side could take those conditions so maybe there is some honour in war, the other horrible side of killing each other. There is another side to it and we can down our arms, clear that away and then start again.

DM It's surreal.

LW It's unbelievable that men can do that.

AA So the military medal, have you got that?

LW My son has that, this occasion of walking around sitting on the outside bench, Poppa lived in a caravan on our property and he walked into the caravan and he came out and had a leather tie box and he handed it to my son and David was 5 and mum nearly jumped out of her chair and said Dad you can't do that, you need those medals, you can't just give them to David he won't appreciate them, giving away the fact that we'd been listening. My Grandfather said I'll give them to who I want and when I need them he'll give them back to me because he knew he would march on Anzac Day regardless, and he actually passed away in the February and this would have been around David's Birthday in the November. So whether he had some inkling I don't know but he never got to wear them again until my mother had a double cardiac arrest which was years after he passed away and the doctors had told us she won't be out of a coma for at least 3 weeks and on the 3rd day my mother awoke and said where's Dad, I said mum he's dead and she said no he was just here, he had on his blue suit and his medals and I asked if I could go to the Anzac march with him and he said not this time. She swore till the

day she died she saw her father in his new blue suit with his medals on and that he'd come back for her one day. When she died she had the biggest smile on her face, she'd been in hospital leading up to the massive heart attack and the whole time they worked on her they couldn't take the smile off her face. So maybe her belief was fulfilled.

20 mins

AA You would like to think so wouldn't you?

LW I do, I do, I really want to think that my Grandfather wore his medals again because he was such a wonderful man, I am getting emotional, a gentle man, both my Aunt and my mum said that they can't remember their father disciplining them with anything other than a look.

DM Mind you the look was enough.

LW And my mother once saying to him you don't hit me because you can't catch me and she ran around the posts of the clothesline in the backyard and she's running around them and Poppas starts running around them and all of a sudden he goes through the middle and grabs her and she said you can't do that, you cheated and he smacked her on the bottom and said I can catch you and don't you forget it. So that was the kind of man he was.

DM Very quiet, very peaceful.

LW A man who loved his garden, loved his charges as in the boys in the Second World War a man who cared and enlisted five times.

DM Five times, we've got the paperwork.

AA Did he bring back anything from the War, like any memorabilia?

DM Basically we've gone through this and this is more or less Second World War so I'm not sure if you're interested but a lot of the places that are photographed here would have been applicable to when he was there the first time around being trained.

LW That's one thing he did talk about when he went back to Gaza which is very tropical now. He said one of the main streets in the First World War they planted out with flowering gums, he said they flowered beautifully in Gaza. He said bright Scarlet gums, he said it was a sight to see.

DM He said by the time he got back there the second time they were fully grown.

LW He went missing in the Second World War, in Greece, well Crete actually and he didn't get back for three months, they found their own way back from Crete.

DM That's when he got the fishing boat, wasn't it?

LW Yes, he borrowed a boat never to be returned. But he borrowed it, he and some other men borrowed a boat and made their own way off Crete and during that time the Army stopped my Nanna's pay because he was neither dead nor prisoner nor accounted for, for three months so for three months they didn't know where he was, so for three months she didn't get paid.

AA That's a bit rough isn't it?

DM Three kids being raised on her own.

LW Mum and your Dad would have been working by then. My mother loved the Sullivans the TV series, it depicted a lot of their family, she was exactly the same age that Kitty started out in the Sullivans, and then for her to go join the Air Force and then her younger brother not much longer after that when he got to the age he could joining the Navy.

25 mins

DM He was on the tail end, stationed at Morotai, he just barely made it age wise.

LW They all had a sense of duty of what they had to do. When my mother, when I asked her why she joined, she said the work she did freed up a man. She said I couldn't do the job that a man did but it freed up a man, and she was quite proud of the fact she served in the Air Force during the War and I suppose that's why in our family from that generation there has been a fair bit of military involvement, it's gone on. It didn't transfer to my son.

AA I was going to ask that.

LW No he wasn't going to go enlist to go out and fight and kill someone because in a way he felt he got the knowledge as if he was there because that one time wasn't the only time Pop had talked to him, I just don't understand how he could unload all of that on a five year old maybe because he thought a five year old wasn't going to take it all in and from David's reaction of going and telling Tunjay my great Grandfather got paid for shooting...he wasn't taking in a lot of the horrors of war. Because for five year olds, TV shows you get shot you're up and about the next day in some other show.

AA So did David march with the medals?

LW David has worn the medals on the Central Coast once, yes. He's going to lend them to my Aunt, she came over from New Zealand one year and her and I marched in the Second Second Battalion because the 20th Battalion didn't exist from the First World war but we marched in the Second Second and had a rollicking time I might add, this year well the year we went to the Anzac March, you Margaret and I there was no one marching in the Second

Second, so they had all gone, there was someone carrying the banner and whether it was Scouts or Army Cadets I can't remember, but there was no one marching.

DM So they have just gone now, there's no one left .

LW It was unusual, I had my nephew with me from the other side of the family, and I said to him you have to look for the Second Second, I said they'll have places listed and I said Souda Bay is one of the...and the gentleman behind us said what do you know about Souda Bay, and my Aunt turned around and said well my father was there, and he said I'm from the Greek and Cretan Battle society and we are having a reunion next week would you like to come.

DM So the three of us all went down and it was held at the Cenotaph and we kept in contact and get bulletins about what's happening with that Australian/Greek connection.

LW So it's like it goes on.

DM It just keeps rolling on.

LW Even though most of our connection with the Second World War even no longer exists, I still go along and look for men I know who went to Vietnam, we still go back to the Anzac marches not as often as we did, it wouldn't have been the 25th April without us standing on the corner of Bathurst and George Street near the Australian Gas Light company taking in our folding chairs and just sitting there and waiting because it was the least crowded spots.

DM It was your temporary home for the day.

30 mins

LW We picked a corner because they slowed down to march past the corner and you always got a better sight and then if you looked up George Street you saw them marching past Town Hall and that was important too.

AA I'll have to keep my eye out for you on TV on the corner there.

LW I don't think they have much telecast from that area either but it was always a good spot and it was funny that Poppa had to come off the First World War and make it back to the Second World War.

AA How old was he when he died?

LW 83 in February 1981, yes he always said he would be the last World War One marching.

DM He really believed it too, he thought he was going to be the last guy standing and he wasn't.

LW Which was really good though in that probably it was only the last 3 or 4 months that he kind of thought no I'm not going to because he had bowel cancer and he must have been suffering a great deal of pain and he maybe then realised well no I'm not going to be the last man standing but it will go on without me. Mum standing there on the corner, she never marched and she always used to call out here comes Darky, which apparently was the woman in charge of the aircraft, I'm sure there was one year that Vivian Bullwinkel marched. Do you know the story of Vivian Bullwinkel?

AA It's funny, that's why I'm looking at you funny. Because I've just read about her in recent weeks and my son is doing a project on her so it's just such a coincidence.

DM You didn't know too much?

AA No I didn't know too much about her at all I've only heard of her name.

DM You met her didn't you?

LW No I met Betty Jeffrey of the White Coolies, who is the woman that "Paradise Road" the movie is based on her book "White Coolies" which my mother told me I had to read when I was 12 and I did. Betty Jeffrey was in a prisoner war camp with Vivian Bullwinkel and so I read on Radji Beach, I think it's pronounced Radji Beach, it's the story of where they shot across the women and Vivian was too tall she was second from the end and the machine gun was set at such a level that it only got her in the lower back and the Japanese when they went out to kill the ones who hadn't died, bayonete the ones who hadn't died, she had got past their knee length, she had floated out further than that and they assumed she was dead, well they wouldn't go in any further as they didn't swim so they wouldn't go in any deeper. I was told at one of the reunions, because being in the Nursing Corps the Army Nursing Corps no longer exists, Nurses enter the Medical Corps now and the association allowed the CMF members to join because the numbers were getting fewer and fewer and we had been to a couple of different association outings as just associate members almost and I had met Betty Jeffrey and I was told and I assume I've seen and met Vivian Bullwinkel but I wasn't introduced to her but she was quite a tall women for her time.

AA That saved her life then?

35 mins

LW Yes it did, so I have a pretty good idea of what she looked like because the only women it could have been was Vivian Bullwinkel and yes my mother always said you have to...that's maybe why I went in the Nursing Corps because they were always pointed out by my mum and then we went to a, this is way out of left field like nothing else, we went to a patchwork quilt exhibition

in the city and we went because they were going to show the Changi quilt and we're standing there looking at it and one of the ladies standing beside us said that's my dress and that's my mother's handiwork and my mother turned to her and said you were in Changi? Yes, my father was a Dutch Plantation Manager and our family was taken prisoner and my mother, she said the whole time I was in Changi I was 11 years old, she said my mother bound me so I wouldn't appear to be an adult because the younger teenagers were taken by the Japanese as comfort women and my mother wasn't going to allow that to happen and she said I only had one dress towards the end there because all my other dresses had been used as bindings and had been used in the quilt, she said it was a terrible, terrible place it was just such a terrible place and they treated us even as women so badly, this was a Dutch woman who said she still had a great hatred for the Japanese and that will never ever change. And my Grandfather, should we mention this story?

DM Yes, we've said this much.

LW My Grandfather was at Christchurch airport.

AA This is Alfred?

LW Yes, back to Alfred he is sitting at Christchurch airport with my Aunt from, his daughter, she's from Dunedin and my mother and father and my son and a busload of Japanese come in and my Grandfather says I've fought in two bloody World Wars to keep these mongrels out of my Country and mum said all the way back thank God they thought he was a Kiwi, thank God they thought he was...and I said but mum the Japanese were on our side in the First World War but it didn't matter and the fact that my Grandfather when he came back from the Middle East and got to Darwin, they said to him no Alf you're too old you're not going out to the Pacific and they discharged him and he immediately turned around and joined the Catering Corps because he wasn't going to leave the Army shorthanded. He was in the Catering Corps he patrolled the beaches he was still at home which was special in 1942-43 he came back he was in the Catering Corps and again like mum allowing someone else to fight overseas or be of more use.

DM There's his sign on papers again from 1951.

LW Yes that when he joined the CMF.

DM He just kept coming back.

LW He had to be made to leave in 53 no 52.

AA You think his experiences would have, he wouldn't have anything to do with it at all.

LW But he thought he had so much knowledge that had to be passed on to the younger generation.

DM That's why they brought him back as an Instructor at Ingleburn.

LW He was a DI and pretty much not meant to go overseas, promised my Nanna, promised I suppose the whole 4 of them he wouldn't go and the night before he was going was the night he announced he was.

DM You can imagine our Grandmother.

40 mins

LW From somewhere she dragged out a lengthy yellow ribbon and she said we will keep half of it on the dock and we will wave it all the way until you can't see us anymore and you wave on your end so we know where you are and Poppa handed it to someone else because he was called to a meeting being one of the higher ranking non-commissioned officers and they waved the whole way. My mum said our arms ached waiving this yellow ribbon because Poppa kept waiving it and it wasn't Poppa but that was what he promised, the one promise he kind of kept to Nanna, kind of.

DM Is there anything else you wanted to ask.

AA What a wonderful story.

LW We haven't answered any of your questions.

AA No you have actually, has there been anything written about him, has anyone written any books or articles or stories.

LW No, there is a book in the library that I've borrowed a couple of times by Margaret, oh what's her name.

DM Is it above the clouds...

LW something above the ground...it's a book on the Second Second.

DM And then there is another one called Purple over green isn't there? So there are two historical but he's not mentioned.

LW There's a book by Maria Hill, Diggers and Greeks, I think you might have it here.

DM That's the Greek connection.

LW That's about the fighting in Greece and Crete and I really I can't imagine, all I know is my Grandfather mentioning about Greece was the parachutes for the first time and he said they watched them, he said it was the most amazing thing to see, you see these men jumping out of planes and he said its only

when you can make out the details of their face he realised hang on we've got to shoot these buggers or their going to shoot us back and that's when we started shooting.

DM Up until then it was an amazing sight.

LW He said you couldn't get over seeing how they did it and he talked about the worst thing he ever saw and I'm not sure if it was the dock at Greece or Crete, the Germans bombing a clearly marked hospital ship and that going down and to him that was not how you did it, war was fought the honourable way, he must have been a knight in shining armour in a another life because you didn't do things like that. The stories of the exchanging and clearing away of bodies from Gallipoli is how war was fought. You had honourable intent.

DM You had good will, as much good will as could be mustered under those circumstances.

LW That's why I don't think he ever talked about the fact that he must have killed people, well he had to kill that German that he took the machine gun from, he never talked about that at all, he didn't like the fact that men went to war I don't think he even thought about the fact that my mother is German, she has a lot of Uncles plus parents living in Australia and people in South Australia and Bendigo and Victoria were interned because their sympathies were with the Germans and to enlist when he did, as early as he did in the war, it didn't have any impact on him at all his family history, it was the rightness of protecting, I always think of the movie Gallipoli when they said we're going to fight the Turks and this camel driver says what for and they say they may take out this country and the guy with the camel is like, why? He just saw that king and country were very important. I think the fact on his enlistments it's got being a true British subject, he was born at Louth, you might as well say the back of Bourke and he considered the British subject thing, England and Australian. He fought for England and on top of that his dad who was English went back and worked in the English factory during the First World War to give service again freeing up someone to fight overseas. We're a crazy lot, all of us don't like the thought of bloodshed or anything.

DM When push came to shove, obviously we felt the need, the family in the past, felt the need to be there.

LW Denise and I both at high school you had vocation day, you didn't have work experience and on my vocation day I went to South Head Naval Base because I was going to join the Navy.

DM Both of us were until my father found out and said no way.

LW And now I look at the girls in the Navy and think oh, my problem was I was born 30, 40 years too late, too early. I would love to have been on a ship and contributed something, not to a war effort but to the service of Australia

AA So it's in your blood sort of thing.

DM Is there any documentation you'd like to copy.

AA I might just wind it up there.