



Bondi Surf Bathers' Life Saving Club



100 years of tradition

Bondi Surf Bathers' Life Saving Club - The Anzac Story



Amongst the first members of Bondi Surf Bathers' Life Saving Club to head off to the Great War were J.E. 'Jack' Barlow and R.H. 'Robert' Crow (the Club honour board misspelt his surname as 'Crowe'). Reflecting the middle class background of many of the Club's members, and the fact that the military looked favourably on surf club membership as evidence of a man's ability to function and lead in a stressful environment, both men became commissioned officers; Barlow with the 3rd and Crow with the 13th Battalion. Having been formed two weeks after the declaration of war.

Barlow and his Battalion were in Egypt by December, 1914. Crows unit arrived in February. Both Battalions were committed to the landings at Gallipoli on 25 April, 1915. Barlow's Battalion was in the third wave that hit the beach at ANZAC cove at dawn while Crow's Battalion arrived late in the afternoon of that fateful day.

Crow's Battalion was committed to the front near a part of the line that would later become known as "Quinn's Post". Eight days later Robert Crow would become the Club's first member to be killed-in-action (KIA).

The Club's Annual Report for 1915 mourned 'the loss of such a fine member is indeed irreparable'.

On 8 August, Barlow would become the second Club member to die when his Battalion took part on the attack at Lone Pine. Both men's graves can be found in war cemeteries at Gallipoli.

By the time of the 1915 Annual General Meeting, 39 of the Club's 77 members had enlisted (more than half). The Club was proud of these men and their positive reflection on the Club; 'we have surely established a record'. In February, 1915 the Club supported a suggestion from Rupert O'Brien calling for the formation of a local rifle club, presumably to give members some arms training before they enlisted.

While most members found themselves in the infantry, some did find themselves in specialist units. The brothers of Club Captain Bill Craven, A.H. 'Bert' and F.J. 'Frank' both ended up in the signals corps. The Club's only pilot was G.E. "'George' Hansell. As a member of the 3rd squadron of the Australian Flying Corps, Hansell's unit was sent to South Carlton, Lincolnshire to prepare for their deployment to France. It was here, while completing training on his AVRO 504, that Hansell died of fever on 13 February, 1917.

Reflecting on the Club's long association with the Army Medical Corps, a number of Club members found themselves saving lives at the front line.

Among them was Life Member, Major John Bond, Captain J.W. 'John' Bean and Captain Dr Keith 'Harvey' Grieve (who had been granted an absence without leave in October, 1914). While attached to the 56th Infantry Battalion, Grieve won the Club's first Military Cross.

At Petillon, in connection with operations of the 19/20th July, 1916, Captain Grieve displayed conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. He reached the original front line of the 14th Brigade section of attack at about 10 pm on the night of the 19th July with the first two companies of the 56th Battalion and immediately established a dressing station. Owing to the battered condition of the front line trenches he was unable to obtain shelter and was thus compelled to work in the open which he continued to do until the Battalion was relieved on the night of the 21/22nd July, 1916.

Single-handed during this period and under heavy shell fire Captain Grieve did his very utmost to relieve the sufferings of the wounded in the Brigade sector. Although joined later by other medical officers, he still continued to work without rest or sleep.

The Club's second Military Cross was awarded to Captain Neville Wallach. The Wallach's were an Eastern Suburbs surfing dynasty. The Ocean Street family held eight brothers. They were evenly spread between Bondi and Maroubra surf clubs. Neville was the first of the brothers to enlist, with fellow member, Henry Flynn, in January, 1915, finding themselves reinforcements in the 13th Battalion.

Flynn was wounded at Gallipoli and returned home in January, 1916; the first Club member to return from the war. After the withdrawal took place from Gallipoli, Wallach found himself in France where a reunion took place with his brother Rupert who had recently been assigned to the Battalion. Wallach fought through 1917 rising to the rank of Captain while still only 21 years old. In September 1917, he was awarded the Military Cross for 'consistent good work'.

The citation noted: 'He was a Platoon Commander in the attack on the Hindenburg Line near Bullecourt on the 11th April, 1917 and though he received a bullet through his thigh within one minute of zero, he led his men over 1200 yards of ground swept by shell and machine gun fire...Captain Wallace is a very capable officer and bears a high reputation for bravery'. Wallach was killed in action on 1 May, 1918 near Viller-Bretonneux leading his men against the German Spring Offensive.

From the beginning of the war, the Club took a very keen interest in its members on active service. The achievements of Club members were seen to directly reflect the calibre of the Club: 'The deeds of our members are closely followed by the Club's supporters, and letters from the front furnish us with substantial proof that these men are truly proving their quality'. Regretably none of this correspondence survives. If it had it may have shed further insights into how war service was shaped by the pre-war involvement of these men in surf lifesaving.

Bondi men had witness the nation's baptism by fire and were also present at the last Australian Battles of the Great War. One of them was Lieutenant Ernest Althouse who was a young subaltern in the 53rd Battalion. The 53rd had fought a long and hard war and on the 29 September, 1918, entered its last campaign of the conflict when, along with American forces, two Australian divisions attempted to break through the formidable German defences along the St Quentin Canal.

It was here, on the second day of the campaign, that Althouse died leading his platoon; the 10th and last member of the Club to die during the Great War

Our thanks to Club Historian, Dr Sean Brawley, for the above