

Private William Walter Jessup (209) – A Short War

William (Will) Walter Jessup was my great-great-uncle. William was born on 16 April 1884 in West Scottsdale. My pilgrimage to William's grave took place on 17 April 2023, just one day after the 139th anniversary of his birth.

Will was the fifth son of Walter and Jane Jessup. Their family would grow to seven sons and four daughters. Will's eldest sister Amy Augusta (later George) was my great-grandmother. My grandmother Olive and her sisters often spoke of their Uncle Will's death in the war. At the North-Eastern Soldier's Memorial Hospital in Scottsdale, there is a [photographic memorial](#) to 44 local men who died in the war¹, and we always looked for Uncle Will's picture whenever we visited.

I know very little about Will's life before he enlisted. The Jessups were staunch members of the Salvation Army and his maternal grandfather had been a Methodist preacher, and a descendant of one of the early Wesleyan preachers in Shrewsbury, England.



Jessup family, West Scottsdale about 1897 (Family Collection)

*Back (Left to Right): Fred, Herbert, Arthur, **Will**. Middle: **Amy, Walter, Florrie, Jane, (nee Harris), Nellie. Front: Mary and Syd.***

As a young man, Will went to New Zealand with his brother Fred and sister Mary where he spent several years. Fred and Mary both married and remained in New Zealand.

Will's sister Amy had married James Thomas George in 1898. Sadly in 1909, James was injured in a work accident and spent many months in the Launceston public hospital. He died in early 1910, leaving Nana George a widow with six children and a farm to run. Will may have returned to Scottsdale to help Amy, as in 1915 they were both farming on Minstone Road, Scottsdale and it is clear her children were fond of him.

¹ <https://placesofpride.awm.gov.au/memorials/258956>

In November 1914, William married Florence (Florrie) Goulston from Springfield. It is likely the families knew each other, as Springfield and West Scottsdale are seven kilometres apart on the Sledge Track. Their son Bernard was born in August 1915.

With the announcement of the formation of Tasmanian-specific 40th Battalion on 18 March 1916, there was a concerted recruitment campaign across the State to reach the quota of 1000 men, with several visits to the North East in early 1916.

On 24 February 1916, the recruiters conducted medical examinations in Scottsdale. Of the 27 men who presented, 15 including William were passed as fit for active service. Like Frank MacDonald MM, Will stated that he had previously been rejected for 'bad teeth'. Will's service number was 209 and he was listed as was described as 5-foot 4½ inches in height, with a dark complexion, brown hair, and brown eyes.²



Will Jessup as a young man (undated Family Collection).

On 8 March 1916, Will's youngest sister was married. This was probably the last family event that Will attended. In the family photo, he is holding baby Bernard. On 11 March, he began training with the 40th Battalion at the Claremont Camp, in Hobart.

² National Archives of Australia B2455, JESSUP WILLIAM WALTER.



Wedding of Florence Jessup and Robert Emmet, Fairmount West Scottsdale, 8 March 1916. (Family Collection). Left to Right *Back*: **Amy George**, Mabel George, **Florrie Jessup (nee Goulston)**, **Will holding Bernard**, 3 x unknown. *Middle*: Jane and Walter Jessup, unknown x5. Seated: **Eva George**, Robert and Florence Emmet, Elsie George. *Front*: Alfred, Ken, Rene and Olive George, unknown.

Why did Will, a newly married 31-year-old farmer with an infant son enlist? Was it family or community pressure? Florrie had two brothers already serving - Bernard (aged 22) had joined in August 1914 and fought at Gallipoli, and Sidney (aged 21) had enlisted in March 1916. The *North-Eastern Advertiser* frequently published excerpts from Barney and other local recruits' letters home.

Will's cousin Roy Harris, also from Minstone Road served at Gallipoli, having enlisted underage in June 1915. Another cousin Granville Campbell (killed in action in June 1917) had enlisted in January 1916. Amy's brother-in-law Richard (Eldred) George had enlisted with the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces (killed in action 1 July 1916).



4

Frank Green's history of the 40th Battalion 'The Fortieth' describes the recruits' training:

It was laid down that every man before leaving Australia had to complete three months of systematic training, and this was carried out at Claremont with more thoroughness and hard work than enthusiasm. At that time the Lewis gun had not reached Australia, and the only bombs available were made from jam-tins and gelnite, so that without the two most interesting activities of the infantryman, the chief items on the syllabus were musketry and drill, and always more drill.

On 1 July 1916, the Battalion, marched out of Claremont Camp and entrained for Hobart, where we embarked on the transport Berrima. Next morning, shortly after daylight, we slipped away from the Ocean Pier, and within a few hours had seen the last of Tasmania for some time. We reached Melbourne on the morning of 4 July, where a reinforcement of the 29th Battalion and an artillery reinforcement embarked, and we left again the same day. On board there were 1.1289 troops from Hobart and 287 from Melbourne.⁵

However, on 4 July 1916, *the North Eastern Advertiser* printed a short article that suggests there may have been local gossip about Will and the tensions in the community.

Rumour Denied.

Mrs W. Jessup wishes to emphatically deny a rumour to the effect that her son, Private W. W. Jessup, had deserted. At the time the rumour was circulated Pte Jessup was ill in the Camp Hospital and has since left for the front.⁶

That there were tensions is reflected in the *Advertiser's* commentary on conscription in May 1916:

The man for instance who has lost a son at the front, and has, it may be, another training to go there, feels that it is not right that the husky sons of his neighbour should continue to stay at home and have a good time, and callously leave the defence of the Empire to others and enjoy the security they are giving their lives to keep.⁷

³ Claremont Camp – J W Beattie (undated).

⁴ Soldiers training at the Claremont Army Camp in the First World War (Tasmania Library, SLT)

⁵ Green, Frank, *The Fortieth*, a record of the 40th Battalion, AIF, 1922.

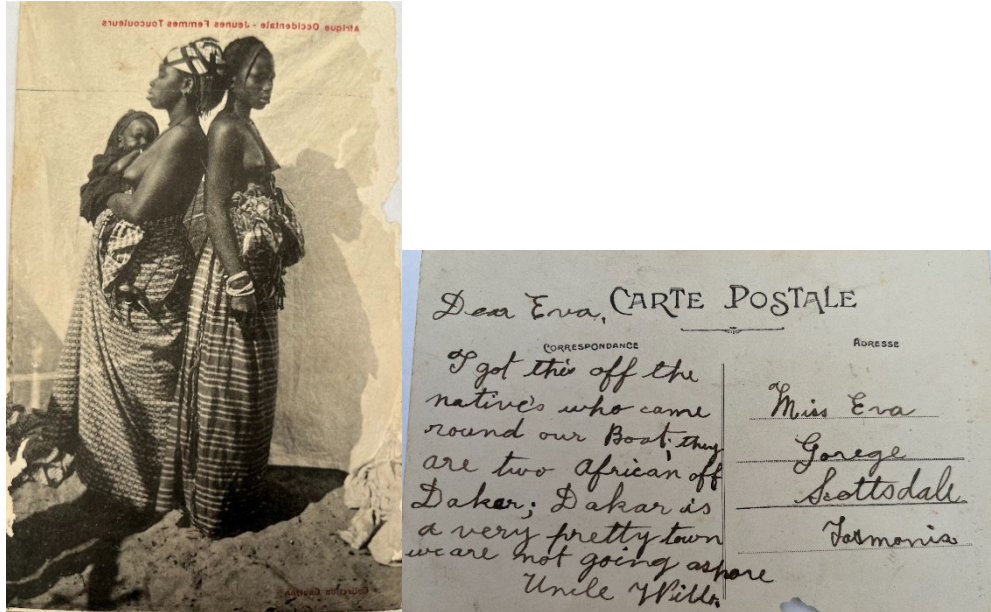
<https://ia801608.us.archive.org/26/items/fortiethrecordof00greerich/fortiethrecordof00greerich.pdf> pages 1-3.

⁶ "Local and General." *North-Eastern Advertiser* (Scottsdale, Tas. : 1909 - 1954) 4 July 1916: 2. Web. 31 Aug 2023 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article151273021>>.

⁷ "Local and General." *North-Eastern Advertiser* (Scottsdale, Tas. : 1909 - 1954) 12 May 1916: 2. Web. 31 Aug 2023 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article151273416> .

Green described the 40th Battalion's journey to England:

After getting outside Port Phillip, we met with very rough weather, and for the first few days most of us were suffering from sea-sickness. As soon as we had got our sea-legs a regular syllabus of physical training, lectures, and other instruction was begun. On 27th July, after a very rough passage, we reached Cape Town, and found there several other transports carrying Australian and New Zealand troops. We had two days ashore, and on the 1st August left Table Bay ... We were convoyed up the African coast by H.M.S. Kent, and on the 13th of August we reached Dakar, the capital of Senegal, after a fine passage from Cape Town. We were not allowed ashore here, and on the following day left Dakar



Postcard sent by Will to his niece Eva from Dakar (Family Collection)

After leaving Dakar the danger of enemy submarines increased, and in the Bay of Biscay we were picked up and convoyed by three destroyers to Plymouth, which was reached on the 22nd of August.

From Plymouth, the 40th travelled all night by train to Lark Hill on the Salisbury Plain for further training. One month later Green tells us:

We had hardly settled in camp when a thunderbolt fell in the shape of an **order to detach 200 of our number to reinforce battalions that had recently had severe losses on the Somme;** and the rumour ran that the whole Battalion was to be cut up for reinforcements. The two hundred going was a fact, and a very unpleasant one. Men were divided in mind between desire to get to the front at once and unwillingness to leave their mates, and the task of selection was an unenviable one. In the end most of these men, after various transfers from one camp to another, came back to us, **but a considerable number we did not see again.**

On 29 September 1916, Will was transferred to refill the 12th Battalion, and marched into Etaples on 1 October 1916. On 16 October, Will was transferred to the 51st Battalion with 67 other

reinforcements. The reinforcements were 'marched in and distributed amongst the depleted companies ... most of whom had been intended as reinforcements for the 12th Battalion.'⁸

The 51st had arrived in France in June 1916 and were moved into the trenches within a fortnight. Their first major battle was at Mouquet Farm in August and September had seen one-third of its strength lost in casualties.

The 51st Unit Diary and Browning's history of the 51st⁹ provide an idea of Will's short time at the front, in the trenches at St Eloi¹⁰:

51st Unit Diary St Eloi Trenches 16 October – 68 arrived in reinforcement. Chiefly of 28th/12th – remainder 40th Battalion drafted.

(Browning – Enemy artillery was active with maintenance of the defences abandoned due to the severity of the bombardment.)

17 and 18 October – Bad weather

(*Browning* – Rain fell on October 17th and flooded section of the trenches. Enemy artillery was active, and men were forced to crouch in the rain to endure the shelling. Rain continued without relent and unrevetted sections to the parapet fell in.)

19 October – Very wet weather.

(Browning – every available man carried out repairs to the defences. Trenches were totally flooded, drains and duckboards were cleaned, repaired and re-laid by teams of mud-laden men labouring in incessant rain. Sections of the paper caved in and exposed the trenches to enemy fire.)

20-21 October – Our patrol dispersed an enemy patrol. Uneventful night. Quiet day.

(Browning – Rain abated but a gusty wind blew and chilled the men in their soaked uniforms, with another enemy barrage to add to the discomfort. October 21 was dry with a heavy frost; enemy artillery was ineffective and repairs were carried out.)

22 October - Enemy generally more active than usual' and parapet damaged. Orders received at 3pm that the Battalion was to be relieved the next day by the 23rd Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment. Officers of latter reconnoitred lines on 21st – 22nd. Voting of all ranks on Conscription for Australia taken (21st). I wonder how Will voted – Yes or No?

(Browning – Conscription was an issue on which the men were divided. Those under 21 were not allowed to vote, they considered this unfair as they were filling a man's role in serving in the army.)

23 October Reninghelst [sic] - Battalion relieved in trenches (11pm completed) by 23rd Bn Middlesex Rgt. On relief went into huts as before as Reninghelst. The total casualties during the period in the trenches was 1 killed, **1 died of wounds**, 7 wounded.

⁸ Browning, N J, *For King and Cobbers. The History of the 51st Battalion, AIF 1916-1919*, Advance Press Bassendean WA (2007).

⁹ Browning *ibid* pages 83- 84.

¹⁰ Australian War Memorial, AWM4 AIF Unit War Diaries: 51st Infantry Battalion, Item Number 23/68/8, pages 1-11.

death, and mentioned his wife, their two children were never mentioned. I discovered Bernard many years later. Another family researcher told me that Bernard felt his father's loss all his life. However, I only learnt about Jean when I was researching my pilgrimage.

By 1922, Florrie had sold the farm in Minstone Road and moved back to Springfield. After her children left home, Florrie lived in Bendigo for some years before moving to St Kilda where she died in July 1965. She is buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery.¹⁴



Bernard married twice and had one son and two daughters. He died in 2004 and is also buried at Melbourne General Cemetery. Jean married Geoffrey Lester and had two daughters and two sons. She died in 2011 and is interred at Ulverstone Tasmania.



Pilgrimage Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium 17 April 2023. William's headstone reads 'Son of Walter and Jane Jessup; husband of F. E. Jessup, of Burnie¹⁵, Tasmania. Native of West Scottsdale, Tasmania. NOT GONE FROM MEMORY NOT GONE FROM LOVE SADLY MISSED'.

In all, there are 10,786 casualties buried at the Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium.

¹⁴ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/191972908/florence-ethel-jessup> Melbourne General Cemetery

¹⁵. The reference to Burnie appears to be an error carried through from Will's service record