

LEAKE

Henry Wyborn

Service No: 161



Basic Information

Name: Henry Wyborn Leake

Service Number: 161

Date of Enlistment:

Age at Enlistment: 24 years 10 months

Civil Occupation: Farmer

Medals, Honours, Awards: British War Medal, Victory Medal, 1914/15 Star

Height: 5 feet 7 inches

Weight: 140 pounds

Chest Measurement: 37 and ½ inches

Complexion: Fair

Eye Colour: Blue

Hair Colour: Light Brown

Father: Robert Buck Leake

Mother: Jane Parker

Siblings: Mary Elizabeth (1874), Robert Maitland (1875), Amy Susannah (1877), Bruce Wyborn (1880), Sophy Emma Hilda (1882), Thomas Hubert (1884).

Married: No



Life Story

Harry Wyborn Leake was born on the 28th November 1889 in York, Western Australia. He had been farming at Kununoppin, near Kellerberrin, when he enlisted in the A.I.F. on the 18th September 1914, aged twenty-four years and ten months. Harry stood five feet seven inches tall and weighed 140 pounds. Assigned regimental number 161 with the rank of Private, he was a member of 'A' Company of the original 16th Battalion.

Leake was present at Gallipoli from late in the first day of the Landing on the 25th April 1915, fighting in and around Pope's Hill and Quinn's Post until he was wounded at the latter position on the 30th May. Leake was evacuated to Egypt with a gunshot wound to the chest, before re-joining his unit at Gallipoli on the 30th August. He was promoted to Corporal on the 9th November, 1915.

Leake was evacuated from the Gallipoli Peninsula on the evening of the 19th December 1915 with the remainder of 'A' Company.

Following his return to Egypt, he was promoted to Sergeant on the 22nd March 1916, before embarking for France on the 1st June. Leake participated in all the 16th Battalion's operations that year and, on the 8th February 1917, was congratulated for his 'very satisfactory report' on completion of the 4th Course at the 4th Australian Infantry School.

Leake was commissioned Second Lieutenant on the 10th April and went into action near Bullecourt early the following day. He was wounded in this battle, receiving a bomb wound to his left leg.

Leake was evacuated to England, where he remained until the end of the year. He was promoted to Lieutenant on the 1st November, before re-joining his unit in the Field on the 14th December 1917.

Leake then participated in the fighting near Hebuterne from late March 1918 where, on the 14th April, he was wounded by gunshot or shrapnel to his thigh and left side.

Evacuated to hospital in England for treatment, Leake re-joined the Battalion near Hamel on the 4th June. He served with the 16th Battalion during the remainder of its operations in 1918.

On the 6th November 1918, Leake was admitted to hospital suffering from influenza and pneumonia. The worldwide Spanish influenza epidemic nearly claimed his life, and he was returned for Australia aboard the *Karoola* on the 13th December 1918.

Leake's appointment in the A.I.F. was terminated on the 7th April 1919. He returned to farming and died at Hollywood Hospital in Perth on the 13th February 1966.

Harry Leake was buried in Kellerberrin.



From left: Capt. L D McCarthy VC CdeG, Henry Wyborn Leake, Lt. J B Minchin DSO MC MID.

All soldiers from York, their faces are war-weary; Leake's gaze chillingly distant.

Image Courtesy of Neville Browning OAM

Following are a series of three letters as written by Harry Leake and sent to his family. They were published in *Bloody Angle, Bullecourt & Beyond* by Ian Gill. The grammar and punctuation remain as printed.

*BW Leake Esq.
Glymenopulo Hospital "Cardonia"
Alexandria
Via Kellerberrin Western Australia
June 30^h 1915*

My Dear Bruce,

I intended writing a long letter to you all, but this must be necessarily short owing to censorship.

I had 5 weeks at the Dardanelles and then had the misfortune to stop a piece of shrapnel in the side. You have had full accounts of the brave doings of our chaps on the Peninsula & I can't add any more to it. I feel proud to have been one of those to participate in such a famous event— it seems almost like a dream now, and feel very thankful to have been so mercifully preserved to have seen so much of it.

Before finally being made hors-de-combat I was struck 5 different times about clothes & person by bullets & bits of shell — ie 2 bullets through the cap, 1 through the puttee, a crack on the shoulder from a piece of shrapnel, splashed all down the side the face by an explosive bullet & finally wounded through the side by a shrapnel bullet. The bullet hit me on the left side, struck a rib & ran right around & stopped just under the skin in my chest so I had a pretty "close call".

I was taken down to the beach on a stretcher & sent on board the Hospital ship where the bullet was extracted. This left me with a hole about 10 inches long round my side. The Hospital ship brought us all here and I was drafted off to the 17th British General.

After being there a fortnight I was discharged here. My wound had become septic and was discharging very much — so as soon as they got me here they put me under chloroform & cut the wound right up — so that at present I have a great gash round my side. However it is quite healthy and going on well. I am able to get up and walk about & feel in tip top form. Will you please send this letter on to Mooranoppin.

*Your affate Brother,
Harry W Leake*

Glymenopulo Hospital Alexandria

July 8th 1915

My Dear Sisters,

No doubt you will be some considerably surprised when you see that this letter was posted in Melbourne, but I am not in Melbourne no far from it! The position is this thus; a youth in the bed next to me is being invalided home for six months furlough with a bad knee. He rejoices in the name of Fred Adams and happened to know Dr Mary H, so we became quite friendly — he is a very nice fellow, and strange to say we have been taken for brothers on several occasions, so you can judge he is rather handsome (?) Well this double of mine has kindly offered to take any letters for me to post them in Melbourne and thus dodge that awful censor.

To business — first and foremost I lost every blessed thing I took with me to the Peninsula including Jane's very valuable balaclava and half of Hilda's colera (sic) belt (the other half got saturated with blood when I was wounded so of course was thrown away; however I have given up wearing colera belts now). I was very sorry to lose the balaclava, because it was the most useful thing I had; but some beast stole my raincoat and in the pocket was the balaclava, consequently exit B. The only thing I have left is Aunt Susie's pair of mittens — I had those in my tunic pocket. But all my shaving gear and other little what nots I lost in my pack when I was wounded. I have managed to get another issue since being here.

Now what am I to tell you about the front? Not much I am afraid! For the first fortnight it was too horrible for words — it was not war, but mere slaughter and our casualties were very high. Our 16th Battn was landed 1000 men and Officers strong and at the end of a fortnight we could only muster 100 and a good many other Battn's suffered nearly as heavily as we did. When I look back now it seems like almost a dream and surely providence must have guarded and protected me through all the narrow escapes I had during the 5 weeks I was there.

It was simply wonderful the way our chaps landed and drove the Turks back off the hills lining the shore. They seemed to fall on them like an avalanche and the Turks fled. I am sure that if a British force had had the Turk's position, no other force would have got near the shore. It wasn't flat country where we landed, but great hills covered with thick low scrub affording cover for snipers galore — and snipers they were! Crack shots, who when they fired, rarely missed.

After the first fortnight the New Zealanders and Australians were firmly entrenched on a semi circle of hills just above Gaba Tepe and although the Turks tried their best to drive us back, we repulsed all their attacks with heavy losses on both sides, and had settled down to trench warfare — our object being to just hold the position we had and let the British and French troops force the Turks up the Peninsula and then we would move forward and make a flank movement.

However the Turks were too well fortified in the large hill of Achi Baba and the British have not been able to get past there, so instead of being in Constantinople in 3 weeks it has taken 12 and they are nowhere near it yet, however, I hope by the time you get this Achi Baba will have been forced and a big move made. We are expecting to hear of this any day now.

Now I have given some idea of the position; of the horrors of warfare I shall not write, but it was terrible to see ones mates being knocked over one by one until out of our platoon of 50 there are only two of us left- but of course about 50% of those are wounded and will be back again later on, but all the rest of them seemed to get killed. I expect you have heard that Ronald McJannet was killed in the action the first day.

Gordon Fink was killed a week after we landed and David Lees was also killed.

Our Major Mansfield (Mansbridge) has been awarded the DSO, one of our Machine Gunners the DCM and several other chaps have gained minor distinctions.

Angus Cramond is our base sergeant here in Alexandria, he is very tired of his job and is anxious to get away for the front. He has been out to see me once. I have not heard anything of Pirani, whether he was invalided home or whether he is still at Heliopolis.

There is a rumour that all the Australians and New Zealanders are to be relieved at the Dardanelles and sent home to England to reorganize. I hope it is a fact, because it would be tip top to be sent there just at this time of year and after our great doings here, we shall get a fine reception. Rumour also has it that from there we shall be sent to France. so that if one is lucky enough to get through it all, what a wonderful experience it will be, but of course this is only a rumour, so can't put too much faith in it.

Now I think I shall close. My wound is going on splendidly and I expect I shall be out of here in about a fortnight's time to the convalescent camp — or perhaps to England.

So love to all — address my letters as usual. I have not had any since I have been wounded, but expect they will all come in a heap one of these days and then won't I have a time reading them all!

Your Affate brother,

Pr Harry Leake

P.S. Please send this onto Maitland and Bruce (brothers)

YORK'S
ANZACS



STORIES REMEMBERING THEM

*Ismailia
Egypt
Jan 13th 1916*

My Dear Hilda & Jane,

We have been camped here at Ismailia just a fortnight. Since we left the Peninsula on Dec 20th we have been moving pretty well all the time and I have not had many chances of writing, consequently my letters have been short and far between so I think my best scheme is to go right back to the time we evacuated and bring this up to date, so that in my next I can "carry on" with our local surroundings.

With these opening words I shall commence — forgetting all I have told you in previous short notes because they were merely to let you know I was still above ground and going strong. First of all parcels, received Jane's tin of goodies and Hilda's colera belt which will be mentioned in due course. Letters received — Jane's 5/11/15, Hubert's 28/10/15, Hilda's 5,20 & 29/11/15, Amy's 14 & 30/11/15 & Bruce's 31/10/15.

The evacuation was a great movement, wonderfully planned and carried out without any loss of life. We were taken to Lemnos where we spent Xmas quietly in perfect weather. A German or Turkish aeroplane had the cheek to fly over and drop several bombs, but fortunately they were wide of their mark. There was a budget of mail waiting in Lemnos for us so the first few days were spent in getting this distributed and thoroughly getting ourselves cleaned up.

I got Emma's tin from Foy and Gibson's and Jane's tin there and nearly everyone also got some sort of parcel, so you can imagine what Royal feeds we had — quite made up for the time lost during our two months stay on the Peninsula. Letters! There were letters galore! I received 20 and some of the chaps as many as 30 — this I may say was a 3 weeks supply. On Xmas Eve every man was issued a little 2 quart billie from "The People of Australia". It was rather bad luck we could not have had those sent from our state, but I suppose it was really a difficult matter the way we were all mixed up at the time. All ours were sent from South Australia and we were like a lot of big kids when we got them — rushing off to our tents and opening them and then comparing and criticizing the contents. One chap in our tent got a baby's comforter in his — not bad! Others I heard of got a watch, a Kodak and various things like that besides the edible things.

On Xmas Day we got a tinned plum duff — also from the People of Australia, but we did not appreciate these so much as if they had been made ones — this sounds a bit Dutch, but still you understand what I mean.

I think we shall all remember the Xmas of 1915 and the few days spent at Lemnos because all those who had any heart at all were feeling depressed to a certain extent over the evacuation and the thought of the brave fellows and comrades who had fallen there, and then all our Xmas mail and good cheer coming in made us think of those at home and the sad hearts there would be when the news came out, so although it was spent quietly, one can't exactly describe it as a happy Xmas.

On Boxing Day we embarked again and sailed to Alexandria and were brought straight here, arriving about 10am on the 30th Dec. I was on duty as Orderly Corporal on New Years Day so had to stay in camp. All the other men who were not on duty spent the day in various ways, some of which would be better not to mention. This brings me into 1916. Last week another budget of mail arrived with Hilda's colera belt, a parcel from Emma and one from Aunty Amy Parker, besides numerous letters already mentioned, or rather dated.

I have not worn a colera belt since I was wounded, but it will be most useful as a muffler for the cold nights here. Now I think this brings us pretty well up to date. I have updated a lot of the things mentioned in previous notes, but there is small detail. I did not enumerate any of the articles in my parcels because everything sent in the wearing line will be most useful and the eatables were tip top and "swallowed like doves". The rug has not come to light yet but I am expecting it with the next lot of mail.

At present we are camped right against the railway station and the township of Ismailia lies on the opposite side of the line. It is winter here with cold dewy nights and warm days, somewhat similar to our winters at home, only much warmer during the day. So far there have been two light falls of rain during the night but nothing to trouble about. We are about a mile from the Suez Canal.

No more for this time. Love to All — I am in good health and feeling fit for anything.

*I remain,
Your Affate Brother,
Cpl Harry W Leake*

Acknowledgements

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References

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