

FROM THE ARCHIVES

AUGUST 1914 AND THE SCHOOL

Much has been made in recent weeks about the involvement of Australian forces in the days after Great Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914. Prior to this date, Prime Minister Joseph Cook had offered to place the Australian Navy at the disposal of the British Admiralty. With a German presence in New Guinea, the navy and citizen forces were soon called into action to protect the northern boundaries of Australia. By August 8, local and regional troops were assembled in Townsville and Cairns and then sent to Thursday Island as coastal defence. Over five hundred troops from the Townsville region were joined by a similar number from the Cairns region.

Of the one thousand troops who sailed, the majority came from the Queensland Kennedy Regiment and the Citizen's Force (a group aged between 18 and 60 from North Queensland Rifle Clubs). When the troops arrived on Thursday Island they were asked if they wanted to sign on for active duties. Some five hundred agreed to sign on and thus became what was termed the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force [ANMEF]. This became the 2nd Battalion ANMEF and later were called the Dirty 500. They were joined by a force of fifteen hundred from Sydney.

Research of past students involved in this initial foray into World War I shows the names of eight past students. Their involvement in the War is a sad albeit interesting one. **Alfred Dodd MEHAN [1908 and re-enrolled in 1911]** was the only past student who sailed from Sydney with the ANMEF [Tropical Unit] E Company to serve on Thursday Island. On his return to Australia he enlisted in the AIF in September 1915 and then served in Egypt and France. Mehan was awarded a Military Cross while in France.

Five past students sailed on the *TSS Kanowna*, two from Townsville on August 8, 1914 and three from Cairns on August 11, 1914. The two from Townsville were both boarders at Grammar and came from the Charters Towers region. **Thomas Harold STABLER [1904]** went on to serve on Thursday Island till May 25, 1915 before travelling overseas where he served at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. **Christian Martin JOHNSON [1906-08]** was a scholarship student who attained Sydney University Entrance Honours but chose to work with the AMP Society on leaving school. He was a keen sportsman who represented the Old Boys' Association at cricket. He served on Thursday Island until January 1915. On returning to Australia he enlisted to serve in the AIF and he served at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. Johnson was wounded on July 29, 1916 in France and on his return from hospital was killed in action on November 15, 1916. Johnson's Mentioned in Despatches was promulgated in the London Gazette of December 28, 1917.

Of the three past students who embarked from Cairns on August 11, 1915, two were day students and one a boarder. **Roi DANNER [1907-1908]** is an interesting case. His grandparents were of German heritage although they had lived in Australia for many years. Roi's grandfather, Arminius Danner, had become a naturalized Australian a month after the war broke out. As Roi was born in Queensland it has to be assumed that he was an Australian. However, there is no evidence to show that he took further part in the War following his return to Cairns after the abortive attempt of the *Kanowna* to unload troops on Thursday Island.

Another past student to suffer the same fate as Danner on the *Kanowna* was **Joseph Edward SPARKS [1908-1910]**. Unlike Danner, Sparks enlisted in the AIF on his return to Cairns. He went on to serve at Gallipoli where he was severely wounded on May 9, 1915. As a result of his wounds he had his left arm amputated and received shrapnel wounds on his legs. On the Speech Day held on June 16, 1916 the Headmaster, Mr Rowland, welcomed Joseph Sparks back to the school and spoke about the loss of six past students on the Gallipoli Peninsula.



J.E. Sparks



J.F. Walsh

The boarder from Cairns was **John Francis WALSH [1904-1906]**. A talented all round sportsman, Walsh was best remembered at the School as being the first student to obtain a first class pass in Chemistry at the Sydney University Junior Examinations. On his return to Cairns he enlisted in the AIF and was sent to Gallipoli. Walsh was killed in action on April 28, 1915. He was the first past student to be killed in conflict.

Sydney Woodfield HARRIS enrolled at the School in 1895, aged nine years. He was a student until 1903 before joining the staff of the Townsville Harbour Board. Harris enlisted in 3rd Battalion Special Tropical Corps and was involved in the overthrow of the Germans in New Guinea. From the 3rd Battalion he was moved over to the Department of Agriculture and was to remain in Rabaul until 1923, years after the war had ended.

The seventh past student involved in that first year was **George Alex TUFFLEY** who sailed on the *S.S. Han* to serve as a sergeant with the Thursday Island Papua group as a member of that expeditionary force on the island. On his return to Australia he enlisted in the AIF and served in France. He was killed in action on August 29, 1916.

Of the eight past students involved in Australia's initial foray in the War, few of them would have encountered any military action. However, five of them would later enlist in the AIF and see action in Gallipoli, the Western Front and the Middle East. Three of them, sadly, would pay with their lives. As Mr Rowland said at the 1916 Speech Day:

*"Think not in vain that they died
Who died for land and home:
They blazed Australia's fame
For all time to come"*

MR BILL MULLER
School Archivist