

Douglas Herbert Harrison Morton

Doug Morton was born in Brisbane in 1897, and was attending Gatton Agricultural College up until WW1. When war was declared, he falsely stated his age to be 18 and enlisted as Private 65157. He embarked aboard SS Carpentaria at Sydney on 7 November 1914.

Although reluctant to talk about many of his wartime experiences, Doug, in later life, did mention some of them to Paul Bland, his grandson. Here, Paul recalls their conversations:

‘Douglas Morton, my grandfather, like so many young men at that time in 1914, was very excited to be going off to war. He had been greatly distressed by the death of his own father, and was committed to looking after his mother, for whom he dedicated much of his army pay.

‘He was part of the second group that went into Gallipoli. Indeed some of the exploits he recalled mirrored those that have later been retold in the movie ‘Gallipoli’. For example, the Aussie soldiers hijinks during their training in Egypt where he was in the street when a piano came crashing from a brothel window, and I believe he may have attended that famous ball at Shepherd’s Hotel in Cairo. The Aussie soldiers had a great contempt for the class system at work in the British Army and had a great rage at their First Field Punishment Number One inflicted on their soldiers.’

Field Punishment Number One, often abbreviated to "F.P. No. 1" or even just "No. 1", consisted of the convicted man being placed in fetters and handcuffs or similar restraints and attached to a fixed object, such as a gun wheel or a fence post, for up to two hours per day. During the early part of World War I, the punishment was often applied with the arms stretched out and the legs tied together, giving rise to the nickname "crucifixion". This was applied for up to three days out of four, up to 21 days total. It was usually applied in field punishment camps set up for this purpose a few miles behind the front line, but when the unit was on the move it would be carried out by the unit itself. It has been alleged that this punishment was sometimes applied within range of enemy fire. During World War I Field Punishment Number One was issued by the British Army on 60,210 occasions.

(ref: Holmes, Richard. *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front*, Harper Collins, 2004)

‘As a consequence, many Australian soldiers showed a reluctance to salute certain British officers for whom they had no respect.

‘The Australians, while in Egypt, had training in bayonet practice, using bales of hay. Doug shared with his fellow soldiers the sense that you could never do this to a human being. But they did.

‘Then it was off to Gallipoli and their first taste of the real war. After making a night landing on the peninsula under heavy fire, all hell broke loose. Of much that happened there, Doug would never speak, but he did mention the unsanitary conditions they had to endure. Conditions resulting from the impossibility of being able to bury the soldiers killed in action, and the enteric fever resulting from the unburied dead. Doug contracted the fever and lost consciousness. When he came to, he found himself in an army hospital at Gibraltar from where he was trans-shipped to England to recover.

‘While in England, in April 1916, Doug attended the memorial service for Australian servicemen killed in the Dardanelles and was moved by Queen Alexandra’s sadness.

‘Then he was sent back to the war, this time to France and Passchendaele.

‘In September, 1916, Doug was severely wounded at the battle for Moquet’s farm.’

Mouquet Farm was located about 1.7 kilometres north-west of the high ground near Pozières. Following the fighting that had occurred around the village earlier in the year, the decision was made by the British to gain control of the ridge beyond the village in order to create a gap in the German lines, behind the salient that had developed around the German-held fortress of Thiepval. By capturing Mouquet Farm, the British hoped that it would destabilise the German position and enable subsequent gains.

(ref: Coulthard-Clark, C. (1998). *Where Australians Fought: The Encyclopaedia of Australia's Battles*)

During the battle, the three Australian divisions of I Anzac Corps—the 1st, 2nd and 4th Divisions—advanced north-west along the Pozières ridge towards the German strongpoint of Mouquet Farm, with British divisions supporting on the left. The approach to the farm, however, was under observation from German artillery spotters who were able to call down barrages on the attackers from three sides of the salient that had developed in the lines.

(ref: Grey, J. (2008). *A Military History of Australia* (3rd ed.)

This resulted in heavy casualties amongst the attackers before they even reached the farm, however, over the course of August and into September, the Australian divisions managed to reach the farm three times, only to be forced back each time.

I Anzac Corps suffered c. 6,300 casualties and was so depleted that they had to be taken off the Front for two months.

(ref: Odgers, G. (1994). *Diggers: The Australian Army, Navy and Air Force in Eleven Wars I.*)

‘Doug was part of a group that had headed out across no-man’s-land between the Australian and German lines. They were armed with hand grenades with the intention of throwing them into the German trenches. However Doug was severely wounded and his body was dumped with a pile of his dead Australian comrades. It was indeed fortunate that someone noticed his arm movements and pulled him out. Following emergency surgery during which he had a metal plate inserted in the back of his head, Doug was sent to Scotland for convalescence.

‘For the courage he displayed in the field, Doug was awarded the Military Medal.

‘He was then sent back to Australia with the other wounded. To allow time for healing, the ship took a longer route through the Southern Ocean - so far south that they were even able to see icebergs. Doug shared a cabin with the famous singer, Harry Lauder.

‘Back in Queensland, Doug took part in enlistment drives to recruit for the armed forces. Then - he himself enlisted again! He was accepted and his ship was in Auckland ready to sail when the Armistice was announced and the war ended. However, because of an outbreak of Spanish flu, his ship was quarantined for some time.

‘When he did return home, his outlook had become radicalised for this was the time of the Russian Revolution, and the fear of Communism’s spread had gripped much of the world’s thinking. Doug was very anti-Labor and took part in a street brawl resulting from a Brisbane tram strike. He hated the IWW (International Workers of the World). He was also closely involved with the foundation of the local RSL. He was loyal to the RSL brotherhood and was proud that every Australian who served in World War 1 was as a volunteer and was not conscripted. He was also a great supporter of other RSL members. One, Bill Yarrow, was to be hounded out of the Club because he was a Communist, but because of the courage he had shown during the war, Doug stood up for him, despite his opposing political philosophy.’

The end of WW1 was marked with celebrations around the Redlands. In some areas, bonfires with effigies of the enemy were built. In 1919, Phillip Forrest established a small farm and cottage on Coochiemudlo. Doug, then 22 years of age and Eric Gordon, another young soldier who had been wounded, worked on the farm as share farmers to help with their convalescence. Eric left soon after due to the loneliness of their solitary life there, so Doug set about farming on his own - an occupation he was to pursue on the island for the next 41 years.

In 1921, Doug married Beatrice Mary Colburn a member of an old Victoria Point farming family. Together, they set about establishing their farm and their family. Doug was tough minded, a hard worker, and impatient with people. His wife, Mary, was more down to earth, she had a wonderful sense of humour and became a tireless worker for the CWA (Country Women’s Association).

There was no regular water supply on Coochiemudlo until a pipeline from the mainland was laid in September 1971. All crops on the island had to be hand watered, using kerosene tins of water hauled from wells. All ploughing, harrowing, and scuffling was undertaken using a draught horse. The crops they farmed included

custard apples Naval oranges, Ripley pineapples, and Lady Finger bananas. The Moreton farm on Coochiemudlo Island became a showpiece of Moreton Bay. Doug and Mary planted avenues of trees, roads were dug, levelled and graded with their own hands.

In 1941 Morton set up the island's first tourist venture, including a jetty and trolley railway and sold fruit salad and cream and Devonshire teas on their farm. Mary had established tearooms underneath the farmhouse and a small produce shop, for day visitors who called from the Wednesday and Sunday tourist boats. Here the Mortons sold tropical fruits flowers and fresh vegetables to the day trippers.

In all, Doug built five Jetties during his 41 years of residence on the island. Doug also built with his own hands a sister jetty on Victoria point to allow access for his boats carrying their farm produce between the island and the mainland. Doug also constructed a six-hole golf course on the western flats.

Doug and Mary eventually retired firstly to Karragarra island and later to Cleveland. Doug passed away in 1980 and Mary in 1989. The residents of Coochiemudlo Island honoured the Morton family and their contributions to the island by the declaration of a reserve in their name on the high Western sector of the island.

Peter Ludlow
August 2014

Sources of information:

1. Characters, Coves and Cliffs Edited by John Pearn. Amphion Press 1995 ISBN 0 8 6776 5984
2. Latitude 27-Longitude 153
3. Joan Bland from The Chronicles of Coochiemudlo (edited by John Pearn) 1993 Amphion Press ISBN 0 8 6776 5984
4. Conversation of Peter Ludlow with Paul Bland, Doug Morton's grandson
5. David Paxton, President, Coochiemudlo Heritage Society