

First to serve

Patrick Bourke

Two names on the Sutherland War Memorial in Sydney are W Clarke and O N Hayes.¹ These men began World War I with similar experiences, but their ultimate fates were quite different. Hayes vanished from history in 1929, while Clarke was one of Australia's estimated 15,000 victims of pneumonic influenza a decade earlier.



William Edward Clarke of Sutherland and Oswald Norman Hayes of Como were amongst the first Australians to enlist during World War I. Clarke, a tailor's presser aged 20, and Hayes, a 24-year-old wool classer, both enlisted on 11 August 1914.² These young men joined the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF), with Hayes in C Company and Clarke in D Company.

At the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914, Germany had a number of colonies in the south and central Pacific Ocean. On 6 August, the British Government contacted the Australian and New Zealand Governments and requested them to seize

control of these German territories. The Australian Government quickly responded, especially as German New Guinea was on the country's doorstep. A military force of 1,500 servicemen was rapidly formed, comprising 1,000 soldiers from NSW and 500 naval reservists from NSW and other States. This became the ANMEF.³

On 18 August around 1,000 soldiers marched through the streets of Sydney to Fort Macquarie, where the Sydney Opera House is today.⁴ They then were taken by ferry to

Cockatoo Island where the next day they left on Hired Military Australian Transport (HMAT) A35 *Berrima*.⁵ The men only found out where they were going when at sea. They stopped at Palm Island for jungle training before travelling to Port Moresby in the Australian territory of Papua, and then on to German New Guinea in early September 1914.

Australia's first land battle of World War I occurred when troops from the ANMEF attacked German forces near Rabaul, on the island of New Britain. On 11 September they captured and destroyed the very powerful German wireless station at Bitapaka. This action cost the lives of six ANMEF servicemen, with four wounded, while 31 men from the German side were killed, the majority being Melanesian police.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

H19497

There is no record of Clarke and Hayes being involved in any fighting in German New Guinea. However, many of the men in the ANMEF were infected with malaria. Clarke was struck down in November 1914 and Hayes was probably infected too. The ANMEF soon took control of German New Guinea and men of this unit returned to Australia in January 1915. They were discharged from the ANMEF at the beginning of March.

It would be true to say that most of the 1914 ANMEF men were very keen to continue their service in the war and many soon joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). This certainly applied to William Clarke and Oswald Hayes. Both were discharged from the ANMEF on 4 March 1915 and within two weeks they enlisted in the AIF. Clarke joined the 13th Infantry Battalion (reinforcements), leaving Sydney with his unit on board HMAT A9 *Shropshire*, on 20 August 1915. Hayes enlisted in the 1st Light Horse Regiment (reinforcements), departing Newcastle with his unit on HMAT A41 *Bakara* on 22 May 1915.

William Clarke suffered very badly from malaria throughout his time in the 13th Battalion.⁶ He was hospitalised on a number of occasions, then returned to Australia in December 1915 as medically discharged due to malaria. After being sent back to Egypt in May 1916, he was

medically discharged again due to malaria in November 1916. Now a Corporal, Clarke was again sent back to Australia on 13 February 1917, finally being discharged from the AIF on 21 August. In a medical report dated 19 November 1916, he was described as “Pale, pasty and anaemic – Has had frequent attacks of Malaria for 2 years – Was returned to Australia for discharge but picked up and was sent to Egypt. Has been in and out of Hospital ever since i.e. since May 14th 1916. Is debilitated. Recommend: Discharge as permanently unfit”. This recommendation was accepted.⁷

After his discharge from the AIF, Clarke was employed in the Office of Intelligence and Regimental Security, Home Office, in Sydney. He died on 2 April 1919 from pneumonic influenza at the Coast Hospital (which became Prince Henry Hospital) at Little Bay, and was buried at the Rookwood Necropolis.⁸

Oswald Hayes also was hospitalised during his service in the AIF because of malaria. However, he was able to continue serving with the 1st Light Horse Regiment until 1918. Hayes saw active service at Gallipoli and in the Middle East. He was promoted to Sergeant on 1 January 1916 and after being selected for officer training became a 2nd Lieutenant on 22 October 1917. Lieutenant Hayes was wounded in the right leg during fighting on 3 November, when the 1st Light Horse Regiment was fighting in the Third Battle for Gaza, 27 October – 7 November, which resulted in the city’s capture. Hayes left the Middle East via Suez for Australia on 23 December 1918, on the grounds of invalidity due to malaria and his leg wound.⁹

After the war, Hayes became an auctioneer and commission agent. In August 1929 he was reported missing to NSW Police by his wife, Eva. On 1 August he left his home at Baradine, after informing Eva that he was going to Walgett to meet two buyers to inspect a property near Dirranbandi, Queensland. It was later confirmed that Hayes instead went in the opposite direction, to Coonabarabran, apparently heading for Inverell. Hayes was last seen on 2 August 1929 at Coolah, where he told people he was travelling to Merriwa to meet buyers who he was going to take to Glen Innes to inspect a property.¹⁰

Although he vanished from sight to his family, his repatriation records in the National Archives of Australia reveal that Oswald Hayes made a claim for the service pension in October 1943 on the grounds on invalidity. He had suffered two strokes and had spent

seven weeks in the soldiers' section of the Perth Hospital. In his claim he stated that he was single man. Hayes was granted the pension on the grounds of invalidity on 2 December 1943. He was admitted to the Sunset Old Peoples Home at Nedlands, Perth, on 13 April 1944 and died there on 12 August.¹¹

References

¹ Sutherland War Memorial.

² Clarke, William Edward, National Archives of Australia (NAA), Canberra, B2455, CLARKE W E; Hayes, Oswald Norman, NAA, B2455, HAYES O N LIEUTENANT/365.

³ Australian War Memorial, Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF), <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/anmef>

⁴ The march through the streets of Sydney was reported enthusiastically by the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 19 August 1914: <https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article15530850>

⁵ The Australian War Memorial has a photo of the ANMEF men aboard the ferry *Kulgoa* as it left Fort Macquarie on its way to Cockatoo Island: www.awm.gov.au/collection/H19497

⁶ Despite taking quinine, by November 1914 some 60% of the ANMEF troops at Rabaul and Herbertshobe were infected with malaria. Malaria could be difficult to cure entirely and relapses were common. Most deaths among Australian troops who suffered from malaria were due to respiratory tract infections, commonly influenza and pneumonia. Craig Tibbitts, 'Casualties of War', *Wartime*: <https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/article2>

⁷ NAA, B2455, CLARKE W E.

⁸ Clarke's name is on the Australian War Memorial's Roll of Honour in Canberra, on panel 68 in the Commemorative Area of the AWM. When he died, Sydney was in the grip of a flu epidemic. For the preceding 24 hours in Sydney area there were 26 deaths and 155 new cases reported, including 8 deaths and 44 new case at the Coast Hospital. *Sun*, 22 April 1919: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article221460423>

⁹ NAA, B2455, HAYES O N LIEUTENANT/365.

¹⁰ Missing Notices, *NSW Police Gazette and Weekly Record of Crime*, 21 August 1929, p. 602: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/251747068/27989571>

¹¹ HAYES, Oswald Norman – Service Number – 365, NAA PP13/1, C30897.