# No Further Report

**Private Alexander Christopher (Alex) Robertson · Service number 1168 · 3rd and 55th Battalions, Australian Imperial Force**

**Katoomba and Rose Bay, NSW · Killed in action at Fromelles, France, 20 July 1916** [2][4: p. 8]

> *A Digger's Story sample. Every fact below carries a numbered citation to the record it comes from. The full list is on the Sources page at the end. Where the records disagree, we say so.*

## A carpenter from the mountains

Alex Robertson was born in the parish of Jamieson, Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales [4: p. 1]. By August 1914 he was a carpenter, single and Church of England, living with his family on Old South Head Road, Rose Bay [4: p. 1]. His father, Andrew Robertson, was his next of kin [4: p. 1].

His enlistment papers sketch the young man. He stood 5 feet 8½ inches and weighed 145 pounds, with a fair complexion, grey eyes and dark brown hair [4: p. 1]. He had already spent three years in the Senior Cadets and a year in the Citizen Army [4: p. 1].

How old he really was is not certain. His attestation paper gives his age as 19 years and 8 months [4: p. 1], which points to a birth around the end of 1894 (our interpretation). The Virtual War Memorial gives an exact birth date of 26 December 1895, and records a baptismal name, "Andrew Alexander Christopher" [6]. Decades later his brother wrote that Alex was "in his 19th year" when he enlisted [4: pp. 62–63], which fits 1895 better than 1894.

## One of the first

Alex joined up in the very first weeks of the war. His file records his enlistment on 19 August 1914, in A Company of the 3rd Battalion [4: p. 5]. He had his medical in Sydney on 25 August, and he was sworn in at Kensington on 29 August [4: pp. 2, 3]. Other records differ on

the details. The AIF Project places him in F Company [1], and the Virtual War Memorial gives his enlistment date as 28 August [6]. His brother later remembered that he "enlisted at Katoomba" [4: pp. 62–63].

On 20 October 1914 the 3rd Battalion sailed from Sydney with the first contingent, aboard HMAT A14 *Euripides* [1][5].

## Gallipoli

After training in Egypt, Alex embarked at Alexandria on the *Derflinger* on 5 April 1915 "to join M.E.F." (the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force) [4: p. 7]. The Australian War Memorial records that the 3rd Battalion "took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915 as part of the second and third waves", and that it attacked at Lone Pine in August [5].

Was Alex himself at the landing? His family believed so. His brother wrote that he "Was at the landing at Gallipoli, and fought throughout the campaign" [4: pp. 62–63]. His service file records no landing date and no wound [4: pp. 7–8]. He sailed with the force three weeks before the landing [4: p. 7], so it is likely he was there (our interpretation). The records don't prove it.

On 1 September 1915 he was taken off the peninsula with influenza [1]; his file also records the influenza and hospital [4: p. 7]. After hospital and convalescence in Egypt, he sailed back from Zeitoun on the *Borda* on 21 October 1915 [4: p. 7]. His file has him rejoining the battalion at Anzac on 6 November [4: p. 8], while the AIF Project says 2 November [1]. He stayed until the evacuation in December and left Gallipoli aboard the *Simla* [5].

## Egypt, and a few days' absence

Back in Egypt, Alex was no saint. His file records that on 5 February 1916 he was absent from tattoo at Tel el Kebir, and he forfeited four days' pay and was given four days' field punishment [4: p. 8]. The AIF Project's version differs: found guilty on 31 January 1916 of breaking camp and of absence from tattoo from 26 to 29 January, with seven days' Field Punishment No. 2 and four days' pay forfeited [1]. He remained a private throughout [4: p. 8].

The AIF was doubling in size. The new 55th Battalion was raised in February 1916, and half its men were Gallipoli veterans from the 3rd Battalion [7]. Alex was one of them, transferred on 13 February 1916 [1][5]. On 19 June 1916 the 55th sailed from Alexandria aboard HT *Caledonian*, and it landed at Marseilles on 29 June [4][1].

## Fromelles

The Australian War Memorial calls the attack at Fromelles on 19 July 1916 "a bloody initiation for Australian soldiers to warfare on the Western Front" [8]. It was meant as a feint, and "The feint was a disastrous failure" [8]. More than 5,500 Australians became casualties, and almost 2,000 were killed or died of wounds [8]. The 55th began in reserve, "was quickly committed to the attack", and ended up "forming the rearguard for the 14th Brigade's withdrawal" [7].

After the battle, Alex Robertson could not be found. He was posted missing on 20 July 1916 [4: p. 8][1]. Albert later remembered the date as "either the 19th or 20th July" [4: pp. 62–63].

## A year of not knowing

For the family, the battle had no ending. The Red Cross card for Alex records only: "Missing 20-7-1916. No further report." That was certified by AIF Headquarters on 1 December 1916 [3: p. 3].

Before that answer came, there was a glimmer of hope. On 13 November 1916 a private of the 55th, Sidgreaves, 4962, told the Red Cross at Etaples [3: p. 5]:

> *"There is an Alec. Robertson who is now in the 5th Div Observation Section. I saw him three weeks or a month ago. He was all right then. I think he is the man enquired for."*

Someone at the Bureau wrote in the margin, "Ask HQ verify" [3: p. 5]. The answer was the same flat line: no further report [3: p. 3]. Whoever Sidgreaves had seen, it was not Alex (our interpretation).

His file shows how hard those months were at home. His parents were anxious for definite news [4: pp. 43–59]. There was a life-insurance policy with National Mutual, and the NSW Recruiting Committee and the Public Trustee pressed for a death certificate [4: pp. 43–59]. A mate from the old 3rd Battalion, Pte A. G. Edwards DCM, wrote about Alex's missing status and his mother's insurance claim [4: pp. 55–56]. Without an official finding, there could be no certificate (our interpretation).

A year after the battle, a Court of Enquiry gave the family its answer. "Previously reported Missing now pronounced by Court of Enquiry to be Killed in Action, France 20/7/16." The entry is dated 26 July 1917 [4: p. 8][1]. Even then the paperwork lagged. A letter on his file dated 6 August 1917 still says "Missing 20/7/16 is the only report received to date" [4: pp. 20, 52]. The Red Cross was not told until Headquarters certified it on 18 August 1917 [3: p. 4].

A death notice for "Alex C." Robertson, "late of Katoomba and Rose Bay", appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 12 September 1917 [9]. After the war the Red Cross closed its file with three words: "No trace Germany" [3: p. 2].

The Australian War Memorial sums up what the family had lived through: "His body was not recovered and his name was not on any prisoner of war lists. It was not till July 1917 that a court of enquiry officially determined he had been killed in action" [5].

## Found after the war

Alex was not lost forever. After the war, Graves Registration Units searched the old battlefields. His file holds an exhumation list from a Bois Grenier report, although the exhumation date can't be read [4: p. 29]. He was reburied at Ration Farm New Military Cemetery, 1½ miles south of Armentières, in "Plot 8 row C" [4: pp. 27, 35]. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission gives his grave as VIII. C. 1., Ration Farm Military Cemetery, La Chapelle-d'Armentières [10][1]. The file gives the plot and row, and the CWGC adds the grave number.

His few effects were forwarded on 15 April 1921, though the inventory can't be read [4: p. 41]. A receipt for his identity disc followed in about October 1921 [4: p. 40].

## What came home to Katoomba

By then the Robertsons were back in the mountains. Andrew Robertson signed for each piece of his son's war [4: pp. 32–37]: - the Memorial Scroll, on 26 August 1921 [4: p. 37]; - the Memorial Plaque, in about April 1922 [4: p. 32]; - the Victory Medal, on 21 July 1922 [4: p. 33]; - and, on 5 December 1927, three photographs of his son's grave [4: p. 34].

A letter about Alex's 1914–15 Star went to Mr A. Robertson at "White Rose", Waratah Street, Katoomba [4: p. 38]. Alex earned all three of the First World War's medals: the 1914–15 Star (number 15327), the British War Medal and the Victory Medal (both numbered 3102) [4: p. 65]. His British War Medal is now in the collection of the Australian War Memorial [5].

The records also name his mother in two ways. A pension was paid to Mary Robertson, of the corner of Lovell and York Streets, Katoomba, as his "Mother" [4: p. 46], while the insurance correspondence is addressed to "Mrs. L. Robertson" [4: p. 45]. We have not been able to reconcile the two.

## "On either the 19th or 20th July"

Decades later, his brother Albert applied for the Gallipoli Medallion on Alex's behalf [4: pp. 62–63]:

> *"my deceased brother ... in his 19th year enlisted at Katoomba early in the war ... Was at the landing at Gallipoli, and fought throughout the campaign ... reported missing and later reported killed in action on either the 19th or 20th July 1916. I trust this information will entitle me to the award medallion being the eldest surviving member of the family."*

Some of Albert's memories differ from the file: Katoomba, not Kensington, and "either the 19th or 20th July", not the official 20 July [4: pp. 2, 8, 62–63]. But after all those years one thing had not changed. Alex was still the brother who went in 1914 and did not come home.

His name is on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, at panel 161 [2].

# Timeline

| Date | Event | Source |
|---|---|---|
| c. Dec 1894 or 26 Dec 1895 | Born in the parish of Jamieson, Katoomba (birth date uncertain) | [4: p. 1][6] |
| 19 Aug 1914 | Enlists, 3rd Battalion, A Company (VWMA: 28 Aug) | [4: p. 5][6] |
| 25 Aug 1914 | Medical, Sydney | [4: p. 3] |
| 29 Aug 1914 | Sworn in at Kensington | [4: p. 2] |
| 20 Oct 1914 | Sails from Sydney on HMAT A14 *Euripides* | [1][5] |
| 5 Apr 1915 | Embarks at Alexandria on the *Derflinger* to join the M.E.F. | [4: p. 7] |
| 25 Apr 1915 | 3rd Battalion lands at Anzac (his own landing not recorded) | [5][4: pp. 62–63] |
| 1 Sep 1915 | Evacuated sick with influenza | [1][4: p. 7] |
| 21 Oct 1915 | Sails from Zeitoun on the *Borda* | [4: p. 7] |
| 6 Nov 1915 | Rejoins the battalion at Anzac (AIF Project: 2 Nov) | [4: p. 8][1] |
| Dec 1915 | Leaves Gallipoli in the evacuation (*Simla*) | [5] |
| 31 Jan / 5 Feb 1916 | Absent from tattoo; pay forfeited and field punishment | [1][4: p. 8] |
| 13 Feb 1916 | Transferred to the new 55th Battalion | [1][5] |
| 19–29 Jun 1916 | Alexandria to Marseilles on HT *Caledonian* | [4][1] |
| 20 Jul 1916 | Missing at Fromelles | [4: p. 8] |
| 13 Nov 1916 | A mate reports an "Alec. Robertson" alive in the 5th Div Observation Section | [3: p. 5] |
| 1 Dec 1916 | "Missing… No further report" | [3: p. 3] |
| 26 Jul 1917 | Court of Enquiry: killed in action, 20 Jul 1916 | [4: p. 8][1] |
| 6 Aug 1917 | "Missing 20/7/16 is the only report received to date" | [4: pp. 20, 52] |
| 18 Aug 1917 | Headquarters certifies killed in action | [3: p. 4] |
| 12 Sep 1917 | Death notice in the *Sydney Morning Herald* | [9] |
| 10 Oct 1919 | Red Cross: "No trace Germany" | [3: p. 2] |
| After the war | Exhumed and reburied at Ration Farm, Plot VIII, Row C, Grave 1 | [4: pp. 27, 29, 35] [10] |
| 1921–1922 | Effects, disc, Scroll, Plaque and Victory Medal received | [4: pp. 32–41] |
| 5 Dec 1927 | Father signs for three photographs of the grave | [4: p. 34] |
| Later | Brother Albert applies for the Gallipoli Medallion | [4: pp. 62–63] |

## Sources

### Primary and official records


1. The AIF Project, UNSW Canberra: Alexander Christopher ROBERTSON, 1168. https://aif.adfa.edu.au/showPerson?pid=257380 *(used where noted [1], often as a second version)*
2. Australian War Memorial, Roll of Honour: Alexander Christopher Robertson (AWM145 Roll of Honour cards). https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1666050
3. Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1DRL/0428: 1168 Private Alexander Christopher Robertson, 55th Battalion (AWM RCDIG1065412, 5 pages; quotes checked against the scans, page numbers are PDF pages). https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1415831
4. National Archives of Australia: B2455, ROBERTSON Alexander Christopher, barcode 8034503 (First AIF Personnel Dossier, 65 pages), pages as cited. Viewed 14 Nov 2026. https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/NAAMedia/ShowImage.aspx?B=8034503&T=P&S=1
5. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September 1917, death notice "ROBERTSON, Alex C", as indexed by the Ryerson Index (https://ryersonindex.net). *(Index entry; the notice itself is to be read on Trove.)*
6. Commonwealth War Graves Commission, casualty record 58779 (Ration Farm Military Cemetery, La Chapelle-d'Armentières, VIII. C. 1.), as reproduced by A Street Near You: https://astreetnearyou.org/person/58779/Private-Alexander-Christopher-Robertson *(check against https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/58779/)*


### Reference


5. Australian War Memorial, REL41877, British War Medal 1914–20: Private A C Robertson, 3 Battalion, AIF (history summary). https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1255004
6. Virtual War Memorial Australia: Alexander Christopher (Alex) Robertson. https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/294768 *(community-contributed; used only for points marked [6])*
7. Australian War Memorial, "55th Australian Infantry Battalion" (unit history). https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51495
8. Australian War Memorial, "Battle of Fromelles" (encyclopedia). https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/fromelles


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**About this story.** This is based on surviving records, which can be incomplete or contradictory. Every statement is cited, and nothing has been invented, including dialogue. Interpretation is ours. Researched with AI assistance and checked by a person.