



Number 26

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# The Bellcord

Journal of the Friends of Hawthorn Tram Depot

# TRAMWAY ANZACS

COMMEMORATING

MELBOURNE TRAMWAY MEN

WHO SERVED IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

1914-18

EXHIBITION OPENS 11 APRIL 2015

MELBOURNE TRAM MUSEUM

@ HAWTHORN DEPOT



Proudly sponsored by VicTrack



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## Tramway Anzacs

The Friends of Hawthorn Tram Depot are proud to announce 'Tramway Anzacs', an exhibition at the Melbourne Tram Museum @ Hawthorn Depot, honouring the employees of Melbourne tramways who volunteered for active service in the First World War.

Conceived to commemorate the centenary of the landing at Anzac Cove, the exhibition is focused on the impact of the First World War on Australian society, and on the lives of the tramway men who served in the Australian Imperial Force – both those who died, and those who returned.

The exhibition will be mounted in the main museum gallery, and consists of multimedia displays, posters and contemporary artefacts related to Australian participation in the First World War.

Funding to mount this exhibition was provided by our primary sponsors, VicTrack and Yarra Trams.

To mark this special event, the Melbourne Tram Museum will be open every Saturday from the launch on 11 April 2015 to 23 May 2015.

The official opening ceremony for Tramway Anzacs will be at 3pm on Saturday 11 April 2015. Members are welcome.

The exhibition will be on display until 12 December 2015, our last open day for this year, and the centenary of the decision to evacuate all Allied troops from the Gallipoli Peninsula.

## Planning and Researching

Planning for Tramway Anzacs began in October 2014, when a vague concept was floated at an FOHTD committee meeting to commemorate the centenary of Anzac by mounting a small display.

## Open Days - 2015

14 March	28 March	11 April
18 April	25 April	2 May
9 May	16 May	23 May
13 June	27 June	11 July
25 July	26 July	8 August
22 August	12 September	26 September
10 October	24 October	14 November
28 November	12 December	

The Melbourne Tram Museum @ Hawthorn Depot is open on the second and fourth Saturdays from January to November, and the second Saturday of December.

Opening hours are 11am–5pm.

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The scope of the project quickly grew, until it evolved into the largest single museum project yet undertaken by the Friends of Hawthorn Tram Depot.

Hundreds of hours of research were undertaken, investigating the service lives of Melbourne tramway men who served in the AIF. The key sources used were the online service records in the National Archives of Australia, archival material from the Australian War Museum, burial records from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Trove archive of the National

Library of Australia, and the Public Record Office of Victoria.

However, our searches were not restricted to these alone. A multitude of other sources were used in the research program, as we chased down sometimes elusive details of every tramway employee who enlisted for war service.

We were able to locate a surprising number of photographs of the tramway men in uniform, which guided the development of the multimedia displays.

Preparation for Tramway Anzacs has been a real team effort. Everyone involved in the project has enthusiastically thrown themselves into ensuring a highly professional result. The project team consists of:

- Mike Ryan – Project Manager
- Russell Jones – Research & Content Development
- Noelle Jones – Research & Multimedia Design
- Adam Chandler – Graphic Concepts & Publicity
- Warren Doubleday – Research
- Kevin Taig – Research & Facilities
- Rod Atkins – Facilities
- Carolyn Cleak – Rostering

Thanks are due to the assistance provided by Norm Maddock, who placed a large amount of material on loan to the museum for display in the Tramway Anzacs exhibition.

Special mention must be made of Mike Ryan's work as project manager, particularly with regard to securing funding, and his coordination of the various strands required to deliver the exhibition. Without his drive and passion for Tramway Anzacs, the scale and quality of this project would not have been possible.

To wet our members' appetite, just one of the fruits of the research for Tramway Anzacs has been included later in this issue of 'The Bellcord'.

We commend the exhibition to all our members, and encourage you to come to the museum with all your friends and families to Tramway Anzacs and participate in the commemoration of our soldiers who served in the First World War.

### Volunteers Required

As mentioned, from 11 April to 23 May 2015, the museum will be open every Saturday from 11am to

5pm, instead of our normal schedule of the second and fourth Saturdays of the month.

In order to support the special event of Tramway Anzacs over this period, we need additional volunteers to work as museum guides and shop assistants.

If you can make yourselves available for any of these days, please contact Carolyn via email to [info@hawthorntramdepot.org.au](mailto:info@hawthorntramdepot.org.au) or phone her on (03) 9877 4130.

Please help us to make Tramway Anzacs a success.

### Kew Depot Centenary

FOHTD has been actively working with Yarra Trams to help plan the celebration of the centenary of the opening of Kew Depot, on Sunday 3 May 2015.

We anticipate that three of our trams will venture out of the museum to participate in the celebration at Kew Depot, pending receipt of all approvals. If successful, this will be the first time any of the museum trams will have operated in Melbourne since the filming of 'The Pacific' mini-series in 2008.

### John Charles Aitken – Tramway Anzac

John Charles Aitken was born at Preston, Victoria, in 1882. A gripman with the Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Company at Carlton Depot, he was living in Abbotsford when he enlisted in the AIF on 18 August 1914.

As he had already served in the Australian militia for 14 years in the field artillery, infantry and Army Medical Corps, he was immediately appointed as a sergeant in the 2nd Field Ambulance, with service number 7. Six weeks later he was promoted to staff sergeant.

Aitken sailed from Melbourne for Egypt on 19 October 1914, aboard the transport HMAT A18 Wiltshire, in the first convoy of troops to leave Australia for the Middle East. After training in Egypt men of 2nd Field Ambulance landed in the first wave at Gallipoli at 0500 on 25 April 1915.

Others remained on the transport, which was converted to a temporary hospital ship, taking wounded back to the Island of Lemnos and to Alexandria, Egypt. Aitken received a special mention

in Divisional Orders on 13 July, for gallantry between 6 May and 28 June 1915.

After the evacuation of the ANZAC area in December 1915, the unit returned to Egypt. Aitken was promoted to Warrant Officer 1st Class in March 1916 and posted to the 1st Field Ambulance. Along with the rest of the Australian First and Second Divisions, Aitken was then transferred to France for service on the Western Front.

On 27 October 1916 he was awarded the Military Medal for his service on Gallipoli. The medal citation reads: 'For repeated acts of gallantry in bringing wounded men in under heavy rifle and shell fire during the period April 25th to June 28th 1915 at ANZAC'.

However, trench warfare on the Western Front was very different in scale to that on the Gallipoli Peninsula. In a letter to his brother written on 16 August 1916, during the battle of Pozzières, he described the stress of managing the men of the 1st Field Ambulance, keeping the flow of hundreds of casualties back from the front lines moving to evacuation points where they could be taken to hospital, unless they died in the care of his unit.

In the most poignant section of the letter he wrote '...I don't think I can stand the strain.' It was clear that he was suffering from immense physical and emotional exhaustion.

In August 1917 Aitken transferred to the 7th Field Ambulance in Belgium, where he was appointed quartermaster and honorary lieutenant. By June 1918 under the stress of active service his health had broken down. Diagnosed with emphysema, chronic bronchitis, chronically arthritic knees and a heart condition, he was assessed by a medical board as unfit for active service. He spent time in hospital in England, before returning to Australia in September 1918, having never carried a weapon into combat.

Lieutenant Aitken was finally discharged from the AIF on 2 December 1919, his health permanently damaged by wartime service. He re-joined the tramways, eventually becoming a senior inspector.

John Charles Aitken died suddenly on 25 March 1933, aged 51.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

H00124

*Staff Sergeant John Charles Aitken MM of the 1st Field Ambulance, Australian Imperial Force.*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

REL:02577.001

*Decorations of Lieutenant John Charles Aitken MM, Australian Army Medical Corps, from left to right: Military Medal, 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal.*

*Photographs from the collection of the Australian War Memorial.*