

# Private Stanley Treloar, MM

## *The pocket dynamo*

*It was the eve of ANZAC Day, 2000. As the young gunner from Australia's Federation Guard strolled along the beach at Gallipoli, his mates noticed that he was particularly solemn and uncharacteristically reserved. He stood silently surveying the surrounding landscape as his thoughts wandered to that historic day 85 years before. His gaze was drawn to the steep cliffs rising from the narrow beach and he thought to himself, 'How did the old boy get up there?'*



*ANZAC Cove, Gallipoli, in 2000, with The Sphinx prominent on the skyline. Photograph courtesy Mary Long.*

Stan Treloar, a nuggetty little fellow from Creswick, Victoria, was the son of a minister, but he possessed a larrikin streak that did not conform with one raised in such a religious family.<sup>1</sup> When his parents set off for church each Sunday, young Stan would hide in the nearby bush to avoid having to accompany them—he felt there were far more enjoyable pursuits than religious studies. With his parents safely out of the way, the boy made the most of his time alone and the opportunity it gave him to get up to all sorts of mischief. His family berated and cajoled the errant young man to change his ways and settle down, but their chiding fell on deaf ears.

At their wits' end, they resorted to chaining the boy to the verandah post when they went to church—the only way they knew that would keep him out of trouble.<sup>2</sup> He wasn't a bad lad, just full of life, a little bit wild and forever on the lookout for excitement and adventure.

As the unruly young boy developed into a man, he did not lose his lust for life, but with maturity came responsibilities he could not shirk. It was time to knuckle down and do his share to support his family and help make ends meet—and help he did. He stood a mere 163 cm (5'5") tall, but what he lacked in height he more than made up for in fortitude and determination. He was never one to be afraid of an honest day's work.

On 16 November 1914, within weeks of Australia's being drawn into the war against Germany, Stan applied to enlist in the AIF.<sup>3</sup> As the medical officer checked his height, a look of concern caused Stan to slowly raise himself onto his tiptoes, changing the officer's frown to a smile as he said, 'Aah! That's better.'<sup>2</sup>

Stan was allocated to the Light Horse and was sent off to Broadmeadows Training Camp on Melbourne's outskirts.<sup>3</sup> As he lined up for his issue of clothing and equipment, the sergeant surveyed the would-be troopers and looking directly at the diminutive new recruit said, with a wry smile, 'Looks like we'll have to get a rocking horse for you, little fella'. The comment brought much laughter from the other Diggers. Stan did not appreciate being the butt of the sergeant's humour. He was heard to mumble a rather uncomplimentary retort that included the mention of a horse's rear end.

Stan's lack of stature continued to create problems. Finally, he was summoned to the squadron commander's tent and advised that a decision had been made to discharge him on medical grounds—basically because of his height.<sup>2</sup> Treloar was devastated. 'What's a few inches got to do with it? It's what's inside that counts', he thought to himself.

He remained at the camp for the next two weeks and as the hierarchy was pondering his fate, Stan campaigned to stay in uniform. He sought and was granted a transfer to the infantry. The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion was already hard at work training in Egypt and Stan was allocated as a reinforcement in the battalion's second draft.<sup>3</sup> He sailed on the transport ship *Clan McGillivray* on 2 February 1915, bound for Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

His mates and superiors alike soon developed a healthy respect for the gutsy soldier. He asked for and received no favours. He was strong and dependable and always quick off the mark to get a job done. He also showed his worth on the rifle range—his years on the land had made him an excellent shot.<sup>2</sup>



It was a cool, calm night as the soldiers lined the railing of the troopship. The enemy shoreline was barely distinguishable against the darkened skyline. Each soldier stood silently in his full marching order. Packs were filled with overcoat, spare clothing, 48 hours' rations, 250 rounds of ammunition, two blankets, a groundsheet, rifle, bayonet, pick and shovel.<sup>5</sup> The weight of the pack caused the

straps to cut into their shoulders as they waited for the order to go over the side. It was soon time to transfer from the troopship to the smaller landing craft. The little steam pinnace chugged towards the shore, towing several small boats filled with khaki-clad ANZACs. The signal was given for the towing lines to be cast off. The only sound that the soldiers could hear above the splashing of the oars, were their own heartbeats.

As the boats nudged the shoreline, the Diggers came under fire from the waiting Turkish troops entrenched in the hillside above the cove. The men tumbled over the side and headed to the beach, weighed down by clothing and packs that had soaked up the seawater as the men waded to the shore. Some made it, but others were cut down while still in the water. Sadly, some drowned as they tried to negotiate deeper water carrying such heavy packs. Stan made it to the beach and scurried across the sand to the relative safety of the cliffs.



*AWM J05589. Troops leaving a transport by rope ladder for the landing at ANZAC on 25 April 1915.*

The order was given to move and the 5<sup>th</sup> made its way up the steep cliffs where the men would be in a better position to attack the enemy positions that were bombarding the ANZACs as they landed.

For Stan, the next couple of days were a blur. He mingled with men from several battalions, all with the same objective, to overrun the Turks. He had never felt such excitement and elation. With the naivety of his country upbringing, this was a grand adventure—days filled with hair-raising action and narrow escapes.

On 26 April, the battalion paused to take stock of the situation. As the roll was called, Treloar did not answer when the sergeant called his name. 'Anyone seen him?' the sergeant asked. The Diggers all shook their heads. Hence, Stan was marked as missing in the company roll-book.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Treloar was still soldiering on at the battle front. He seemed to be everywhere—lugging ammunition, digging in, helping with the wounded and taking his turn in the forward trenches.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, Stan sustained his first battle wound when a round struck him in the face. The injury wasn't particularly serious but it was enough to warrant his evacuation to Egypt.<sup>3</sup> After a brief stay in the hospital at Heliopolis, Stan was sent to the base camp at Zeitoun where he continually pestered the medics

to send him back to Gallipoli. His persistence paid off and he returned to the Peninsula on 22 May.<sup>1</sup>

In the ensuing months, Stan proved his worth a hundred times over, but on 14 August his luck ran out. As he manned his position, a Turkish 'cricket ball' bomb landed in the trench alongside him. When it exploded, some red-hot shrapnel speared into his right knee and left wrist, fracturing the bone.<sup>3</sup>

This time the wounds required specialist treatment in England where the doctor operated and was able to remove the metal fragments.<sup>3</sup> Treloar made a speedy recovery, but he never stopped hankering to get back to his mates at the front.

Unbeknown to Stan, his mother had written to her local Member of Parliament requesting that he be sent home. As he was the only son, there would be no-one left to run the farm if he were to be killed.<sup>3</sup>

His commanding officer summoned him to his tent. 'Private Treloar, your mother has requested that you be sent home on compassionate grounds. We're not going to force the issue. It's up to you. Do you want to be sent back to Australia?'

Stan's answer was straight to the point. There was no way he would agree to leave his mates.<sup>2</sup>

In October of that year, he'd had enough of the mundane hospital routine, so he decided to give himself a spell of local leave in London. For his efforts, he was given seven days confined to barracks.<sup>3</sup> On another occasion, he turned up drunk for guard duty, which earned him 48 hours in the cells.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the doctors thought it best to get rid of him, so they marked him fit for duty and shipped him back to Gallipoli. He rejoined the battalion on 6 December, just in time to be evacuated a few days later.

Back in Egypt, the expansion of the AIF was taking place and, as a result, the battalions of the division were being split to form the nuclei of the new battalions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Consequently, elements of the 5<sup>th</sup> went on to form the 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>6</sup> Stan marched into his new battalion on 19 February.<sup>3</sup> He was there for less than a month when the call went out for volunteers to bolster the ranks of the stretcher-bearers in the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Stan, always on the lookout for a new challenge, was quick to respond.

The 57<sup>th</sup>, 58<sup>th</sup>, 59<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Battalions were moulded into the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade, under command of the legendary Boer War veteran, Brigadier 'Pompey' Elliot. Stan landed in France on 23 June 1916 and immediately headed north by train.<sup>3</sup>

The battalion's first major action took place in mid-July at a place called Fromelles. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division suffered grievous losses in its first major battle against the Germans on the Western Front. The brigade lost 1735 men in the two-day

battle—the 58<sup>th</sup> was almost annihilated by machine-gun fire and lost 248 men, almost a third of its strength.<sup>6</sup>

Stan performed his duty expeditiously and effectively. He continued to risk his life, crawling across open ground to retrieve the wounded and bodily move them to the safety of a shell hole. Many times his efforts were in vain, as he found the men he sought to recover had been killed instantly or had died of their wounds before he could reach them.

After Fromelles, the 58<sup>th</sup> was withdrawn from the line to lick its wounds and await reinforcement. The Diggers fought through 1916 at the Somme, then faced their first European winter. The Australians were unaccustomed to the length and severity of the Continental winters and they suffered terribly. In the winter of 1916–1917, some twenty thousand Australians were evacuated from the lines with exhaustion, frostbite or trench feet.

In the early months of 1917, the battalion pushed towards the next site of bitter trench fighting and consequent heavy Australian casualties—Bullecourt. Every day the battalion saw action, Stan faced situations that would have overwhelmed lesser men, yet he never faltered. If there was a particularly nasty job that needed to be done, Stan Treloar was always ready and willing. Such was his dedication to his duty that he caught the attention of the Commander of the Fourth Army, from whom he received a card congratulating him on the outstanding manner in which he conducted himself in the field.<sup>3</sup>

On 29 September, Stan was wounded in the leg by a bullet from a German sniper's gun. He was evacuated to England for treatment that would last for two months.<sup>3</sup>

By mid-March 1918, the battalion was holding the line just east of Messines. One dark, starless night, Stan and a mate were enjoying a quiet break outside the command post when a huge explosion rocked the battalion front, followed by a barrage of shells. An officer ran to assess the situation and reported that one of the platoons has been hit by a minenwerfer—a heavy trench mortar bomb—and had taken casualties. Stan and his mate instinctively rushed to the scene where they found one dead and six wounded.<sup>7</sup>

They immediately placed one of the wounded on a stretcher and headed back to the aid station. They wasted no time transferring the patient to the care of the medical staff before grabbing another stretcher and returning to the front. On the way back with the second casualty, they heard the warning scream of an incoming shell. Throwing themselves face first into the dirt, they sought shelter in the depressions of the battle-scarred ground. When the danger had passed, Stan got up, shook off the dirt and turned towards where he'd last seen his mate 'C'mon clobber, let's keep going.' But his friend could not answer—he'd been blown to bits.



*AWM E00081. France. December 1916. Australian ambulance men assisting their comrades who are suffering from trench feet.*



*AWM E00130. Western Front, January 1917. Australian horse drawn and motor transport moving along a snow-covered road.*



*AWM E03266. September 1918. Letters from home were a great morale booster. Many Diggers had left home in 1914 and had not seen their families for almost 4 years.*

Stan made four more trips to the front to single-handedly retrieve the remaining casualties. As he prepared to go back yet again, an officer caught him by the shoulder and demanded to know where he was going.

‘To get what’s left of my mate, Sir! To get what’s left of my bloody mate.’<sup>7</sup>

For his actions, Treloar was awarded the Military Medal.<sup>7</sup>

Stan was afforded a short break from life in the trenches when he was chosen to be a member of the guard of honour for the Corps Commander, General Monash as he was knighted in the field.<sup>2</sup>

By October 1918, the Allies had the Germans on the run. The 58<sup>th</sup> was now just north-east of Bellicourt and locked in a night battle with the enemy infantry. Stan was being kept busy shuttling the wounded from the battlefield to the aid post. Another group arrived at the post and told Stan of a couple of wounded soldiers who were pinned down in front of their position, the accuracy of the German machine-gunners having thwarted all attempts to retrieve them. Without hesitating, Stan grabbed his medical satchel and made his way to the forward trenches.

On his arrival, Stan sought directions to the stranded men. He was told one was some 60 yards away, the other ten yards further on. The platoon commander questioned Stan on the sanity of venturing towards the men in view of the bombardment they were taking.

The caution was wasted on Stan. He judged his time and climbed over the parapet. Keeping as low as he could, he crawled on his hands and knees to the position of the first wounded Digger. Rolling into the shell hole, he found the soldier in a bad way. He tended the man's wounds as best he could, then, again waiting for the right moment, Stan crawled back to the post with the patient clinging to his back.

He took time to catch his breath before making the second trip. Once more, Treloar ran the gauntlet of the relentless German attack. He crawled, dragged and pushed the wounded Australian safely back to the battalion's lines. As he dropped exhausted into the trench, the men sent up an almighty cheer. They wouldn't have believed it if they hadn't seen it with their own eyes.

Old Pompey himself signed the recommendation for the bar to the Military Medal. Stan Treloar's actions are epitomised in the last sentence, which reads:

*His courage, self-sacrifice and devotion to duty have been on all occasions beyond praise and he continually sets the highest example to all round him.<sup>7</sup>*



AWM REL31043.  
The Military  
Medal.

Treloar was sent to London to be invested with the award. At Buckingham Palace, Stan felt uncomfortable as he waited in the line with the other Diggers. As his name was called, he moved forward and took his place in front of the bearded monarch. The citations were read out and the King made idle chit-chat. He asked Stan, 'What was it like at the front, Private?'

Stan blurted out his honest but colourful reply. 'Bloody awful!'

The aide to the king blushed and clicked his heels in a vain attempt to cover any further outburst. Unperturbed, the King smiled as he pinned the medal on the proud Digger's tunic.<sup>2</sup>



Like many of the soldiers returning home after the war, Stan had trouble finding inner peace after the horrors that he had seen—the slaughter, the carnage, the misery and the wanton disregard for human life. He enjoyed a drink, sometimes two and sometimes too many, anything to banish the nightmares brought on by memories of the past four years.<sup>2</sup>



He worked at a variety of jobs, labouring, driving and delivering wood. In civilian life, as in uniform, he was just as determined to overcome adversity and make the best of any situation. He continued to drink and his conversation was still liberally sprinkled with colourful adjectives.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually he met a young lady, Frances, who gave his life new meaning. They married and Stan vowed never to drink or swear in front of her or their children—the couple produced four girls and a boy. Stan became a devoted family man and catering for their needs became his sole objective. He continued to be tormented by the nightmares, but now he had someone with whom he could share the pain and anguish.

His kids often asked him about his medals. He would jokingly tell them, ‘This one’s for drinking the most rum. This one’s for drinking the most beer and this one...’<sup>2</sup> He idolized his children and the children adored their father.

As the years passed, Stan’s health began to suffer. Of most concern were the pieces of shrapnel in his body that had begun to move and cause him severe pain. Stan, now an old man of 70, developed pulmonary pneumonia which took its toll.<sup>2</sup> He had fought his last battle, but he was valiant till the end.

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Author’s note: Stan Treloar’s bond with the Australian Army continues today, with two grandsons in uniform—Warrant officer Class Two Graham Roberts and Sergeant Stephen Roberts—and one great-grandson, a good mate of mine, Corporal Shannon ‘Feathers’ Peacock, who provided me with the information for this story.

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### Notes

- 1 Author, interview with Corporal S Peacock, 2000
- 2 Author, interview with family, 2000
- 3 National Archives of Australia: B2455, WW1 Service Records, 1290 Private Stanley Treloar MM
- 4 AWM 8, Unit Embarkation Nominal Rolls, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF, 1914–1918 War
- 5 Bean, CEW, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Volume I, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1936
- 6 Bean, CEW, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Volume III, the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1936
- 7 AWM 28, Recommendation Files for Honours and Awards, AIF, 1914–1918 War