

Premier's ANZAC Spirit Prize

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this report may contain the images and names of people who have died.



Edward (Ted) George Boxer

SX7528

Edward Boxer was born in Western Australia on the 21st of June 1911, to parents Charles David Boxer and Gumillya Button. Charles and Gumillya had seven children and Edward was one of the younger children. After living in Western Australia, Edward moved to the remote town of Penong on the Nullabor Plain, in South Australia. Photographs show a man who is tall and robust striking in his looks, healthy and fit for service with a striking side-profile and broad shoulders. According to his attestation papers his religious denomination was The Church of England. Edward worked on a farm up until he enlisted in the army at 29 years of age in Streaky Bay on the 25th of June 1940. According to his Attestation papers (*Appendix 1 & 2*), Edward undertook The Oath of Enlistment at Wayville on the 2nd of July 1940 and was declared fit for service and joined the 2nd/48th Infantry Battalion, with the service number SX7528. Edward was one of the thousands of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander service people that fought for Australia in WWII. Sources report that he was farewelled by returned WWI soldiers and the local town's people. Penong had a total of 11 men enlist in WWII.

The 2nd/48th Battalion embarked overseas on the SS Stratheden (*Figure 1*) on the 17th Nov 1940. This ship proceeded via Columbo to Suez in Egypt where they disembarked. The unit then camped in El Kantara in Egypt before proceeding to Dimra in Palestine for further training.

His battalion joined the Battle of Tobruk with the aim of aiding the defense of Tobruk as a countenance to the Axis Power's forces. Ted's battalion served for eight months in heavy warfare in the Battle for Tobruk; *'Helping to hold the "fortress"'* (AWM, n.d.).



Figure 1: SS Stratheden launching on the 10th June 1937.

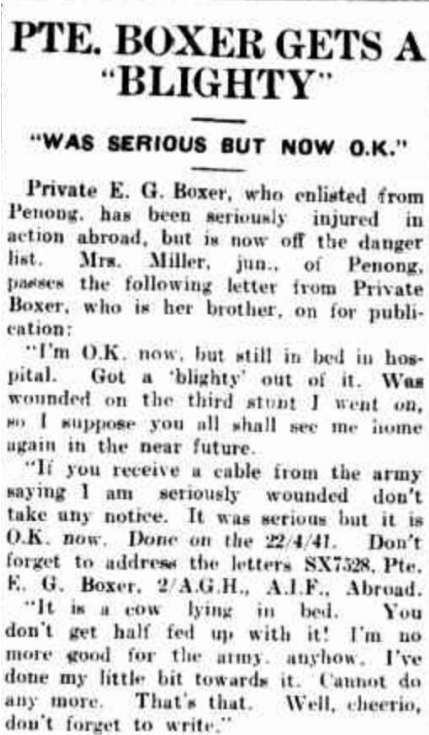


Figure 2: A newspaper report mentioning the letter Edward sent home during his time in hospital.

Unfortunately, Edward did not serve with his mates for the entire duration of the Tobruk campaign. He was injured in action on the 22nd of April 1941, struck by an anti-tank shell, severing his right leg off below the knee. Pte. Boxer is recorded as describing the pre-dawn attack in the *'West Coast Recorder'*; *"A company of 90 men were advancing on the enemy in the outer defences, about 20 miles from the town. At a distance of 300 yards they charged in a line with fixed bayonets, and despite the fire of the enemy, they reached their objective and brought in 350 prisoners"*. Ted reported that the Germans *"threw up the sponge"* when confronted by the Australians with bayonets. The German soldiers reportedly did not resist the attack and surrendered. In the moments after his serious injury Ted reported not being immediately in pain due to adrenaline and recalled picking up his boot with his foot still inside. His story was also mentioned in *'Tobruk to Tarakan'* written by John Glenn. John's interview recalls: *"Before I knew where I was I saw that the blood was spurting out, and I thought I won't be here much longer! And expected to pass out. I had carried two scarves in my pocket, being cold, and straight away I tied one above my thigh and the other above the knee"*. (Lee, n.d.).

Private Harold Parker (SX7572) also wrote about Ted *"I don't think anyone could have taken a knock better than he did. He was just marvellous. It was some time before he was picked up, and he had lost a terrible lot of blood. The average man would never have seen it through... Ted just lay there smoking, and to look at his face one wouldn't have thought he had even a scratch."* (Lee, n.d.) Figure 2 further describes his humorous and unphased perspective. His commentary depicts his ability to make light-hearted banter with his fellow soldiers and mates, whilst suffering from a horrendous injury.



Figure 3: Group of soldiers 'invalided' home. Edward is on crutches to the right.

Ted wrote letters back to his family in Australia at the time of his injury (*Figure 2*) but he was not allowed, by the nurse in-charge, to mention the severity of his wounds. His letters remained light-hearted and optimistic and focused on assuring his return. Presumably he didn't want to overly concern his loved ones.

On the 26th of May 1941, Edward was transported back to Australia on a hospital ship and was admitted to hospital after contracting pharyngitis. Sometime around August 1941, Edward was granted leave and returned home to Penong, but this appears not a simple journey for a wounded man. The West Coast Recorder (Port Lincoln) on the 18th August 1940 refers to Pte. Boxer's return to Penong (*Appendix 4*) and that he paid own fare home to the Eyre Peninsula. This is not typical for invalided soldiers. The Port Lincoln mayor contacted the Minister for the Army in support of Ted and asked him why this was allowed to happen. The response reported was that all the wounded soldiers who applied did receive warrants to travel 'with the exception of Pte Boxer'. The stated reason being Pte Boxer had made his own way home and did not apply through the formal process for compensation. The article does not state whether Ted was ever reimbursed for his return journey home (*Appendix 4*). Although conjecture this could have been down to Edward feeling apprehensive or feeling that there was no support extended to him because of systemic racism.

Little information exists on Ed's life after the war. He was reportedly eager to return to North Africa (*See figure 4*) and the army despite his horrific injury. He married his wife Doreen and become a step-father to her children. He also participated in a study for returned soldiers that examined the impact of amputated limbs on their lives. Pte Edward Boxer passed away on the 14th of April, 1967 at the age 62.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since Australia's colonisation have faced discrimination. First Nation's soldiers enlisted willing to fight for a country that denied them citizenship and the vote. An estimate is that approximately 3000 Aboriginal soldiers enlisted and received between 1/3 to 2/3 the pay of their fellow soldiers (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, n.d.). The treatment of Australia's First Nations soldiers has been reported by historians as being without parity. An important focus for reconciliation involves all Australians learning the truth about First Nation history, including the contribution to war.

The Anzac spirit is a symbol of the attributes of mateship, endurance, courage, ingenuity, as well as good humour. These values reflect the actions and sacrifices made by Australia and New Zealand service people. These values both guided the efforts during war time and guide Australia's identity after the war. Edward demonstrated courage, endurance, humour and mateship during his time serving.

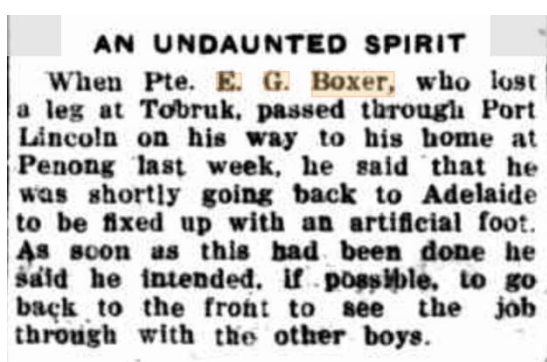


Figure 4: Article from the Port Lincoln times, 'An Undaunted Spirit'

The Battle of Tobruk was a significant battle during WWII. 15,000 Australian men defended Tobruk starting in April 1941. Soldiers faced constant shelling, gunfire, desert conditions, heat and food rations. German propaganda named the Australian soldiers 'The Rats of Tobruk'. This implies they were like rats always fighting back and could not be defeated. In the West Coast Recorder 1941, "Pte. Boxer gave an indication of the stiff fight being put up by the Australians at Tobruk when he said they were each rationed to a pint of water a day. He had worn the singlet for 21 months, yet he wanted to go back again to help his mates." This source is an example of the

perseverance and endurance Edward exhibited. It also affirms his dedication and drive to serve a country that was yet to recognise him as a citizen. Several local newspapers from Adelaide and the Eyre Peninsula

featured Edward's story (*See appendix 4 through 7*). Headlines such as, "Hero Welcomed Home" or "An Undaunted Spirit" Port Lincoln Times 1941 (*Figure 4*)" highlighted Ted's standing within his community, his perseverance and optimistic spirit. The Pt Lincoln Times also reported on the 3rd Jul 1941; 'Pte. Boxer passed through Pt Lincoln last Friday on his way to visit his parents. Someone said, 'Hard luck,' he [Edward] replied, "It might have been worse."'

Multiple accounts and letters describe the endurance from Edward. A letter from Pte. Harold Parker shows insight into his character. *'I don't think anyone could have taken a knock better than he did. He was just marvelous. It was some time before he was picked up, and he had lost a terrible lot of blood. The average man would never have seen it through.'* (Lee, n.d.) All the stories also commented on his wonderful sense of humour.

Edward served courageously and formed strong bonds with his fellow soldiers and his community (Figure 5). A true reflection of this bond is how his mates treated him after his injury. In a letter from Private Harold Parker, Ed's natural ability to demonstrate mateship is shown.

'It was just the good spirit of Ted that helped us along. Some days things wouldn't be going the best, dust, heat, and shortage of water—and we'd all start rousing, and he would say something and start a laugh, and in pretty short time we'd all forgotten we had troubles and be quite contented.' (Lee, n.d.)

Word count: 1514 (Including captions)

Part B:

This project began when I was allocated Edward Boxer to research for my school task. I initially accessed the Virtual War Memorial and began to look through his profile. I soon became very intrigued by Edward's story of how he lost his leg and lived to the age of 62.

I followed the research guides from the Virtual War Memorial which provided basic information relating to his hometown, where he was born, his birthdate and date of death. Edward's service record on the Virtual War Memorial shows the dates he enlisted and then the dates was wounded and discharged. I then accessed Ted's nominal roll, which contained very little information. I was able to gain access to Edward's attestation papers, service records and casualty forms through the National Archives of Australia (NAA). His attestation papers allowed cross reference to the VWMA to check his enlistment. Through Ted's service and casualty forms I could see his movements from enlisting, to then being granted pre-embarkation leave to visit his family. His service record did not show any periods of AWL and Edward did not break any rules during his service.

The Australian War Memorial archives had helpful unit diaries. I searched through the 2nd/48th Infantry Battalion diary for September 1940 but I found little information, as in this month this battalion was fairly inactive.

Valuable resources were also found in the Trove Stories and articles were written featuring Edward in various local newspapers and gazettes. Newspapers such as the Port Lincoln Times and the West Coast Sentinel had covered him. Through these articles I found out a lot about Edwards spirit and the impact his service had on his local community. The other key takeaway from these articles was that the date he had been wounded on the Virtual War Memorial was wrong. The VWMA had said he was injured during September but he was in Port Lincoln during September 1940. His service records show he was in fact injured on the 22nd of April 1940. In response to this I have emailed VWMA to correct this information.

Through ancestry.com I was able to trace Ted's ancestry and family history. This resource gave me insight into his siblings, as one of his brothers also served in the A.I.F as well. This source along with his attestation papers allowed me to discover his Aboriginal heritage. This discovery brought a whole new meaning to the sacrifice that Edward gave to Australia and the work that he did. He appeared proud to serve his local community. He is an individual that deserves to have his story shared.

Word count: 432




Figure 5: 2nd/48th battalion departing on the train, families and friends farewelling them. Source VWMA

Appendices:

Appendix 2: George Boxer Attestation forms, Source: (National Archives of Australia, n.d.)

A.A. Form A.200.

AUSTRALIAN  MILITARY FORCES.

ATTESTATION FORM

FOR SPECIAL FORCES RAISED FOR SERVICE IN AUSTRALIA OR ABROAD.

Army No. SX 7528
 Surname BOXER Other Names Edward George
 (Block capitals)

Unit _____
 Enlisted for service at Wynaby Bay (Place)
South Australia (State) June 25th 1940 (Date)

A.
 Questions to be put to persons called out or presenting themselves for voluntary enlistment.*

1. What is your name? 1. Surname BOXER
 (Block letters) Other names Edward George
2. Where were you born? 2. In or near the town of West Australia
 In the State or country of West Australia
3. Are you a natural born or a naturalized British subject? 3. Natural born half born
4. What is your age and date of birth? 4. Age 29
 Date of birth June 21st 1911
5. What is your trade or occupation? 5. Farmer
6. Are you married, single, or widower? 6. Single
7. Have you previously served on active service? If so, where and in what arm? 7. No
8. Who is your actual next of kin? (Order of relationship:—Wife, eldest son, eldest daughter, father, mother, eldest brother, eldest sister, eldest half-brother, eldest half-sister) 8. Name Charles David Boxer
 Address Permy
 Relationship Father
Permy
9. What is your permanent address? 9. _____
10. What is your religious denomination? (This question need not be answered if the man has a conscientious objection to doing so) 10. Church of England

I, Edward George Boxer, do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to serve in the Australian Military Forces within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

Witnessed by Robert A. Marshall (Signature of Attesting or Witnessing Officer.) E. G. Boxer (Signature.)

* The person will be warned that should he give false answers to any of these questions he will be liable to heavy penalties under the Defence Act.

National Archives of Australia NAA: B883, SX7528

Appendix 1: George Boxer Attestation Forms, Part B: Source: (National Archives of Australia, n.d.)

B.

MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

I have made full and careful examination of the above-named person in accordance with the instructions contained in the Standing Orders for Australian Army Medical Services. In my opinion he is—*

1. Fit for Class I.
2. Temporarily unfit for Class I.
3. Unfit for military service.

Place Wayville Date 25 June 1940
 Signature of Examining Medical Officer Johnnie Capt
 * Classifications which are inapplicable to be struck out. (Reasons for unfitness to be stated.)

C.

OATH OF ENLISTMENT.


I, Edward George Boxer, swear that I will well and truly serve our Sovereign Lord, the King, in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia until the cessation of the present time of war and twelve months thereafter or until sooner lawfully discharged, dismissed, or removed, and that I will resist His Majesty's enemies and cause His Majesty's peace to be kept and maintained, and that I will in all matters appertaining to my service faithfully discharge my duty according to law.

So Help Me God.

Signature of Person Enlisted E. G. Boxer
 Subscribed at Wayville in the State of South Australia
 this 2nd day of July 1940

Before me—
 Signature of Attesting Officer Johnnie Capt

* Persons who object to take an oath may make an affirmation in accordance with the Third Schedule of the Defence Act. In such case the above form will be amended accordingly and initialed by the Attesting Officer.



National Archives of Australia NAA: B883, SX7528

Appendix 3: Pte. Boxer- Service and Casualty Record- Period when he was injured: Sourced:

REPORT.		Record of all casualties regarding promotions (acting, temporary, local, or substantive), appointments, transfers, postings, attachments, etc., forfeiture of pay, wounds, accidents, admission to and discharge from Hospital, Casualty Clearing Stations, etc. Date of disembarkation and embarkation from a theatre of war (including furlough, etc.).	Date of Casualty.	Place of Casualty.
Date.	From whom Received.			
4.1.41	1 AGH	Evacuated 1 AGH Mumps & then to X base	7/1/41	Songa Ridge
17.1.41	4 AGH	Discharged 1 AGH	8/1/41	Songa Ridge
19.1.41	4 AGH	Rejoined unit from 1 AGH struck off X base	11/1/41	Wanna
30.4.41	4 AGH	Wounded in action. Amputation right leg.	30/4/41	W. East
23.4.41	2 do	Evacuated 4 AGH GSW Rt leg & then to X base	30/4/41	do
29.4.41	63 B6H	Evacuated 4 AGH to 63 B6H GSW Rt leg	28.4.41	do
4.5.41	2 AGH	Evacuated 63 B6H to 2 AGH. GSW Rt leg	28/3/41	do
28 MAY 1941	Nom Roll. A/F A.36	Embarked Middle East for return to Australia av. m. o.	26.5.41	do
		28 Hospital Ship.		

Johnnie Capt LIEUT.
 FOR OFFICER-IN-CHARGE 2nd ECHELON.

WOUNDED SOLDIER PAYS OWN FARE

Explanation Received From Minister for the Army.

TOWN COUNCIL SEEKS REFUND

An explanation has been received from the Minister for the Army (Mr. Spender) as to why Pte. E. G. Boxer, who was invalided home from Libya, was not issued with a warrant from the Government, enabling him to obtain free travel to Eyre Peninsula from Port Adelaide when returning to his home town (Penong) recently.

When it became known that Pte. Boxer had paid his own fare, the mayor of Port Lincoln (Mr. R. F. Poole) wired the Minister, stating that the people of Eyre Peninsula demanded to know why this had been allowed to happen.

The Minister explained that warrants for free travel had been issued to all soldiers invalided home, except one (Pte. Boxer), who had been motored by a private person to Brighton. When he later decided to proceed to Penong, he purchased his own ticket, instead of applying for a warrant which would have been made available to him.

On receipt of this information at the last meeting of the Port Lincoln Town Council. Cr. O'Leary moved and Cr. Swann seconded a resolution that the Minister be asked to refund Pte. Boxer's fare.

Appendix 4: Article explaining circumstances around Edward's fare home: Sourced

HERO WELCOMED HOME

PENONG'S RECEPTION TO
PTE. BOXER

A rousing welcome was tendered Pte. E. G. Boxer on Wednesday evening of last week. Ted lost a leg in the Libyan campaign. According to reports of fellow-comrades he displayed great fortitude at the time by having the presence of mind to bandage his leg, thereby to a certain extent stopping the flow of blood from the wound and helping to save his life until aid came.

One of the largest gatherings seen at the hall was there to welcome him. He was picked up by two diggers of the last war, C. C. Murray and M. Brodie, and carried on their shoulders, while another digger carried what Ted called his "timber yard"—or crutches.

An aisle of girls and boys waving flags was formed from the entrance to the stage, through which Ted was carried amid ringing cheers, and placed on a seat on the stage, the assemblage singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

Then the band struck up a dancing tune. The whirling and the twirling of the dancers was in the hands of Mr. E. Bourne. Speeches were made by Mr. M. Beck in characteristic and eloquent style, followed by Messrs. B. Brook, F. Bratten (two ex-servicemen).

Ted responded, thanking everybody for their kindness, and Miss Dorothy Muegge, on behalf of the Cheer-up Club, presented him with a monetary gift.

A supper, provided by the ladies, was enjoyed.

Next day Ted left by train for Adelaide, where he will be provided with an artificial leg, and it is hoped, a job.

Appendix 5: Article outlining the welcome home received by Edward

WELCOME HOME TO PRIVATE BOXER

Private E. G. Boxer returned home to Penong on Saturday after being abroad in the A.I.F. for several months.

Private Boxer, who lost his right leg below the knee during action, now gets about on two crutches and is still as comical and cheery as ever. Private Boxer, who is a very popular young lad, has the sympathy of everyone. All appreciate his bravery.

Last Wednesday night the Cheer Up Club gave him a welcome home in Penong Hall.

Appendix 6: Article upon Edward's return: Sourced:

PRIVATE BOXER NOW HAS ARTIFICIAL LEG

Private E. G. Boxer, of Penong, is home on a month's leave wearing an artificial limb to replace the one he lost as the result of enemy action abroad. He is very proud of his new wooden leg, which was fitted in Adelaide, and embraces the latest natural action joints at knee and ankle. Private Boxer is not discharged yet. He is hopeful of securing another job in the military service for the duration of the war.

Appendix 7: Article upon Edward's return home:

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West Coast Sentinel , 1941. Pte. Boxer Gets A "Blighty". *West Coast Sentinel* , 6 June.

West Coast Sentinel , 1941. Welcome Home to Private Boxer. *West Coast Sentinel* , 4 July.