

Stanley Wall

..... was born at Windsor, NSW in 1889. Windsor at that time was a relatively small community on the outskirts of Sydney at the foot of the Blue Mountains.

Stanley's father, James Bligh Wall was a well-known figure in the District and when he died in 1895 there was in the order of one thousand mourners at his funeral. Stanley Wall most probably adopted his father's second name as a mark of respect although he only appeared to have used the second name during his time playing football.

Stanley's mother ran a boarding house in Glebe St Windsor, which was also where the local Dentist plied his trade.

Stanley Wall was recorded as being active in both social and sporting events as a schoolboy. Contemporaries of Stanley from this locality included Harold Sly (Wests #138) and Vere Masters (Wests #127). Stanley attended the Windsor Superior Public School and was one of four boys from the school that successfully passed the Railway Apprentice Clerks Examination. A total of four hundred boys sat for the examination and only sixty four passed.

In 1908 Stanley Wall joined the Western Suburbs Rugby Union Club. He did not appear in the first few matches of the season but likely had his opportunity to play First Grade when a number of the Wests Union players went across to play for the Cumberland Rugby League team. Cumberland were late entrants in the newly formed rugby league competition and as such there was a lot of player movement in the Western Suburbs district.

A newspaper report from July 1908 recorded a protest from the St George First Grade rugby union team against Western Suburbs rugby union for playing an unqualified man in Wall the fullback, who for the last three years had lived at Windsor.

The Wests (RU) Secretary, A.W. Green did not deny the charge but turned defence into attack and accused the St George Club of unsportsmanlike conduct, for not protesting before the match began. Further Mr Green wanted to claim the match in question because St George were a few minutes late whilst Judd's (St George player) broken leg was being strapped up. The defence must have been effective as nothing further appeared to come from the protest.

Stanley Wall played with the Western Suburbs Rugby Union team from 1908 until 1910 and was elected on the General Committee in 1909.

In April of 1911 the Windsor Athletic Rugby League Club was established. Messrs. Johnsen, Dean, Masters, Liddle, Allen, and S. Wall were elected as the General Committee. The Windsor Athletic Club was the first in the district to play under league rules.

Also reported in the same article was a note that stated, "Among the footballers who have left the Association to play League football in Sydney is Stanley Wall of Windsor." 1911 is the year that Stanley Wall joined Western Suburbs Ruby League Club and he played with Wests for two seasons.

There is no record of where Stanley Wall was living between 1908 and 1912. However, Stanley's future brother in law Alfred White was living at Granville and it may have been there, that Stanley resided while playing football.

When Alfred White married Stanley's sister in 1911, it was stated that their future home would be at Guilford. Stanley was close to Alfred White and was best man at his wedding.

During 1914, Stanley Wall travelled to Fiji to work on a sugar cane plantation managed by Mr. James White. It is not known whether James White was related to Stanley's brother in law Alfred White but given that James White was mentioned specifically in the Windsor and Richmond Gazette, then it is quite likely that there was some familial connection.

In 1914 war was looming in Europe and in January 1915 it was reported that Stanley Wall of Windsor had enlisted in Fiji and would undergo training in either New Zealand or Victoria. Stanley did not enlist with the AIF but instead went with the Fiji 1st Contingent and joined the British forces in England.

The Fiji Contingent was a relatively small group of sixty one enlistees, all British or citizens of its Colonies. Fijian natives were not allowed to enlist until 1917 and when they were finally permitted to join the war effort, it was to undertake work behind the lines such as labouring and loading operations.

The 1st Fijian Contingent joined the King's Royal Rifles with the exception of Stanley Wall. He initially joined the 6th Dragoon Guards but, in his haste, to reach the fighting on the Continent, he transferred to the East Kent Regiment, "The Buffs."

Stanley Wall sent a series of letters to his mother Edna throughout the war period which were subsequently published in the Windsor and Richmond Gazette.

The first extract was from the period prior to embarking for France written from the Western Cavalry Depot, Newport, 15 March 1915. It was the lull before the fighting when young men were savouring new experiences and delights from foreign parts. But the reality of what they were facing was ominously confronting them and it would be quite soon that they faced the reality of war. Stanley Wall wrote;

"Enclosed are a couple of interesting snapshots. The gentleman in the group with us, Mr Hopkins, and his family, are Australians. They came to England about ten years ago and are now living in Bristol. They are wealthy and live in an immense dwelling, have motors, hunters, and all that is the wealthy man's lot. Hearing we were in Newport and from Fiji, he came down in his car and made himself known to us. I told him where I came from, and he surprised me by all he knew about Windsor.

Well, to cut a long story short, he invited us all down to Bristol and what a time we had! They insisted that we come in the Fijian uniform and what a stir we caused when we motored round the town in his two big cars. They took us to the swell cafe, and we did justice (needless to say) to all the good things.

At evening we caused a great sensation. Mr Hopkins had two boxes for us at the theatre and had a magnificent basket of daffodils and wattle with 'Fiji' in a scroll of red rosebuds. Being the youngest member of the party, I had to present this to the leading lady, Miss Dorothy Ward. How did I feel? Why, they almost had to push me up on the stage.

The audience cheered to the echo. I stood up with my chest stuck out a yard, and in my rolled up sleeves. The audience yelled, speech! speech! and I nearly collapsed. But after I had swallowed about ten lumps in my throat, I said a few words and was cheered again. Miss Ward has since sent me her portrait and a beautiful letter of encouragement and thanks.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins were pleased beyond bounds at the tremendous reception we had. The three days we spent down there will be the most pleasant of our recollections. Everybody raved over

us coming so far to fight for our country, and should we be wounded at the war we will have a home to come to in Bristol.

I am leaving for France on the 24th of this month. Before you have received this note, I hope to have 'lain' low some of the Germans. You will hear of some terrible fighting in about a month's time. Now the warm weather is coming, everything is on the go. There are millions more good lives to be lost before this terrible war is half finished. It is to be fought to the bitter end, and sure enough it is bitter.

I am here to do my little bit and do it I will. I have no fear of being killed and feel quite sure I will see you all again." Stanley Wall was soon in France and after a few months there he appears to be coming to terms with the difficulties of this war. In a letter dated 25 July 1915, Stanley Wall wrote to his mother as follows;

"Just a line to let you know that I am still like Johnie Walker, going strong. Today I received a copy of your paper, and I can tell you I read every item with interest. Was awfully disappointed when I read how slow the local boys were in answering the call. Stir them up - they are all wanted. A few of them ought to be here. They'd have to jog along then. I'm not a fullback now - very much a forward."

Not long after the above letter was written, Stanley Wall was wounded in action at Dickiebuch (Dikkebus), south west of Ypres, Belgium. His account of that period is outlined in a letter written by him, dated 15 August 1915 at Coombe Lodge Hospital, Great Warley, Essex, England;

"Well you will notice that I am over in England. This place is glorious. It belongs to a wealthy gentleman, who has given the house and grounds to the military authorities to be used as a hospital. We have fine grounds, all kinds of game, and last but not least, a fine fishing pool. We put in hours at the pool, which is teeming with Roach.

As for my injuries, sorry to say I am not doing too well. The left arm received a terrible knocking about. A bullet entered the arm below the elbow, breaking the bone, went right up through the elbow, giving same an awful fracture and came out of the upper arm just below the armpit, fracturing the humerus.

The 'accident' occurred five weeks ago and the arm is stiff as wood. The doctors tell me that I was fortunate in not losing the arm and say that it will always be stiff from the elbow. My nerves are also terribly unstrung. This is how it happened;

We were at a place called Dickiebuch (Dikkebus), three miles to the right of that awful place Ypres. The Boche had been shelling us for two days on and off, killing 43 of our gallant boys. At dawn on 6 July they charged us, and ---- what did we give them? With rapid fire and machine guns we soon thinned them down. Not satisfied, they came again at dusk to get another doing.

We were all pretty well fagged out, when the glorious order came along the line ---- The Buffs will advance at 2am and Middlesex and Surreys to reinforce. ----- At 1am our grand 9.2 guns from somewhere in the rear began to boom for one hour. Then exactly on the tick of 2, it was a case of out you go my lucky boys, and the best of luck, as our officer used to cry.

Well, away we went. The Boche, not to be denied instead of staying in their trenches as we did, came out towards us. The trenches were only 50 yards apart. The Germans charge differently to us. As you get up to them, they fire from the hip. That's exactly how I was hit.

After bowling over one burly chap, I seemed to go mad and went straight at a fellow. Was just going to give him a jab with the bayonet when he let go straight at me. Luckily, he struck the arm, and still

more luckily it brought me to my senses. I tried to give him one but missed, he did the same. Then as I was standing with the arm hanging useless, my pal (who was afterwards killed) fixed Mr Boche's account with a well-directed point to the chest.

Talking about charges, one does not know what he is doing. All you know is that you are after that trench, and to get there you will be killed or kill. I could not tell you what was happening five yards either side of me. All I know is that when I was hit one of my own men tipped me over and said to lay low till, I could crawl back to our own trench.

There the Red Cross men bandaged me up and got me away as quick as possible to the dressing station. There my wounds were again dressed and I was sent by motor to another place, then by train to No.1 Canadian Hospital at Etaple. I was in this hospital for one month before being sent to England. I'm afraid that I will not be able to go out again as much as I would like to on account of the stiff arm.

Belgium is in an awful state. If once you had been to Ypres, you would never forget it. The fine place has been battered to a mere dust heap, and no matter where one goes, he is faced with either graves, exposed corpses or half buried ones. In a trench I was in for eight days, just out in front of the barbed wire lay about 14 dead Germans and we could not get out to bury them on account of the heavy firing.

It would take too long to tell you all, so you will excuse me. I expect to be home again in six months' time. This war is not nearly finished yet, so buck those local boys along and let's all see what the Hawkesburyites can do."

Stanley Wall was an optimistic and motivated young man and while he finished his recent letter on an upbeat note, it is also clear that in a matter of a few short months the effects of war, the destruction and devastation and most of all the loss of life had a profound impact on him. He would go back home as a war hero but what he saw cannot be unseen and must have had some effect on him for the remainder of his life.

A note on Stanley Wall's British Army First World War Pension Record states; "I hereby certify that the following is the character given to No. 6748, Private S. Wall, The Buffs, on discharge 31 October last. His Officer states that he was a man of very good character and thoroughly reliable. I shall be obliged if you will cause this to be recorded on his documents or filed therewith." signed, Colonel Patterson, Commanding Depot, The Buffs.

The Fijian Government was no doubt grateful for Stanley Wall's service and apart from the perfunctory notifications, The Governor of Fiji, Sir Bickham Escott, personally wrote to Stanley's mother. In his letter he said;

Government House,
Suva, Fiji

"May I ask you to accept the deep sympathy of Lady Escott and myself in your anxiety on account of your gallant son, originally a member of the 1st Fiji Contingent, but now of the East Kent Regiment, who, I have been informed by the Right Honorable the Secretary for the Colonies, has been wounded in action. I trust that the wound which your son received may not prove to be serious, and that he may soon be restored to health.

Believe me, yours sincerely,"

Bickham Escott,
Governor of Fiji

Stanley Wall returned to Fiji in January 1916 as a war hero. The Fiji Times gave an account of Stanley's return;

Private Wall, who left Fiji nearly a year ago, who served with the gallant "Buffs" in France and was wounded, returned home by the R.M.S. Niagara yesterday. He was accorded an enthusiastic welcome.

As the big, beautiful mail boat steamed alongside the wharf, and the great crowd caught a glimpse of their returning hero, cheer after cheer rent the air. The Suva and Mission Brass Bands struck up appropriate music. The crowd again took up the cheering, which obviously impressed while it pleased the gallant lad returning home.

Private Wall was not nervous. He cheerfully waved back greetings to his friends on the wharf. He was tanned and soldierly looking, and as he stood on the upper deck of the big boat, looking down at the sea of faces, he seemed the personification of the spirit that has earned little Fiji renown throughout the civilised world.

Captain Swinbourne went out with the Health Officer's boat and met Private Wall on the steamer as she came up the harbour. From the wharf the Acting Colonial Secretary and the Hon. Crompton were the first to ascend the deck of the Niagara, and the crowd watched with interest, the brief exchange of handshakes and welcome words.

As a band of the steady Defence Force and Cadets, headed by half a dozen school girls dressed in khaki, marched down the wharf they excited much comment. The company formed into two thin lines, along which Private Wall passed. As he moved down the line, shaking hands, the crowd again took up the cheering.

The bands struck up their music and the 'conquering hero' wended his way down the wharf followed by the great admiring crowd. He was last seen prior to leaving for the Drill Hall, entering one of the line of motor cars, accompanied by Hon. Compton and the Acting Colonial Secretary amidst a shower of congratulations and good wishes.

A formal reception was held at the Drill Hall for Stanley Wall. The following is an account of events;

The Drill Hall was quickly packed. As Captain Swinbourne entered with Private Wall, the audience rose en masse, and cheer upon cheer shook the commodious building. Private Wall was introduced to His Excellency the Acting Governor and other prominent ladies and gentlemen, and for the first time since his arrival, Private Wall appeared to be embarrassed. His Excellency with characteristic tact quickly put the hero at ease.

His Excellency said that they had assembled to afford a welcome to Mr. Stanley Wall on his safe return to Fiji from the front. It was almost a year ago since Mr. Wall left Suva as a member of the 1st Fiji Contingent, of which they were all so justly proud. The speaker hoped that it would be possible to extend a similar welcome to all of their soldiers who had the good fortune to return to Fiji. He wished particularly that as Private Wall was the first to return, he should receive this welcome."

Mr. Wall was a native of NSW, Australia. As a lad he served in a School Cadet Company and later on in an Infantry Battalion. He was also known as a sound and strong football player, and thus had good qualifications for his selection to the Fiji Contingent.

On arrival in England, Mr. Wall elected to join the Dragoon Guards and was thus separated from the rest of the Fiji boys who had joined the King's Royal Rifles. He soon realised that he was not going to

the front as soon as he could wish, and so he secured a transfer to the East Kent Regiment, known as the "Buffs."

On his discharge from hospital, Mr Wall was also discharged from further active service, and although he was offered light employment in England, he elected to return to Fiji where they were pleased to welcome him and to thank him for what he had done on behalf of his King and country. He had done his part faithfully and well and the speaker would like him to realise how grateful they were to him for that duty done, and to those who had laid down their lives in the cause, and to whom they would not be able to return thanks.

His Excellency asked Mr. Wall whether he intended or wished to return to his former employment in the Penang Sugar Mill, Ra. The speaker did not want to press Mr. Wall for an early decision but was able to offer him employment almost immediately in the public service. Mr. Wall was wished a speedy recovery from the effects of the wounds he was suffering and best wishes for the future. His Excellency asked Mr. Wall to say a few words but said (to laughter and applause) it may be a more fearsome task than that of facing the enemy in the trenches.

Mr Wall's words were few and happy; "I can hardly find words to express my thanks for the welcome. Really, it is worse than being in the trenches to have to face all you people. But I thank you."

The proceedings terminated with more ringing cheers for hero Stanley Wall. Long may he live!

In the evening, Private Wall was the guest of the Hon. Crompton, at his residence, where along with a number of friends he was entertained to dinner. Many happy speeches were made with Private Wall telling modestly, with wonderful realism, the story of the great happenings at the front. It was a memorable night for all privileged to be present.

Although the Fiji community were generous in their welcome to Stanley Wall, he did not remain on the Island that long. In April 1916 it was reported that he arrived back in Windsor, NSW. In the interim he had been appointed as a Sub-Inspector with the Fiji Constabulary. On his return to Australia, he brought with him from Fiji, seventeen Germans who were to be interned at Goulburn. It was claimed that the German's were giving trouble in Fiji and amongst other things were supplying firearms to the natives.

In April 1916, it was reported that Stanley's mother was leaving Windsor to take up residence at Granville. The family appears to have had a connection with this part of the Western Suburbs since Stanley Wall's football days. It is not clear whether Stanley Wall ever went back to Fiji. He was married at Katoomba NSW in 1917, his son Stanley Kent Wall was born at Granville in 1918 and he settled at Woodville Rd Guildford, NSW by 1920.

A little over a decade from when Stanley Wall was on the battle fields of Europe, he suddenly passed away at his premises in Anzac Parade Kensington NSW in June 1927. He was 38 years old and left a widow and young son.