Jim Edwards and Alice Bloomfield
World War One postcards, private collection

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At the beginning of the twentieth century postcards had become so popular a collector’s item that they accounted for three quarters of all mail delivered in Britain.1 Alice Bloomfield lived in Beverley, Western Australia, at the outbreak of World War One in 1914. She had amassed a large collection of postcards from around the world by that time, and continued to do so during the war. Her postcards now provide a glimpse into the lives on the homefront in Western Australia and those experiences of the troops abroad.

James Richard (Jim) Edwards, 23, was Alice’s sweetheart when he volunteered for the Australian Imperial Force in July 1915. He was recruited into the 11th reinforcement of the 10th Light Horse.2 Australians greatly admired the qualities of bushmen and considered their perceived qualities of resourcefulness, independence, larrinkinism and egalitarianism to be set them apart as great soldiers.3 Indeed, those bush skills were considered to add to the elite fighting skills of the AIF.4

A Beverley farmer, Jim departed from and eventually returned from the war via Fremantle. While away from home he kept up a correspondence with Alice in which he described the activities and adventures of the war. The tone of his early postcards suggests that he was at first caught up in the euphoria of the adventure. He described Fremantle to Alice as busy and exciting, encouraging her to make up for the boredom of Beverley by a trip to the port town.5

In fact, women were expected to have a limited social life during the war. They were encouraged to engage in patriotic duties, to not socialize with me who shirked their duties. Opportunities for dances and social engagements were therefore sometimes limited.6 Jim’s postcards to Alice reveal that some of this pressure, at least, may have originated from the absent soldiers themselves. From Port Said, Jim advised Alice to ‘Beware of MOTOR TRIPS and CHAMPAGNE, I hear all about it’.7 Though jovial in tone, he perhaps considered her role to ‘wait and weep’, as Michael McKernan has identified was common on the Australian home front.8

Correspondence between Jim and Alice continued throughout the war. He assured her that he was ‘feeling very fit’ and encouraged her to not to take too much trouble to send him comforts. Many Australian women stayed active on the homefront by filling sand bags

IBSN: 01995502868, 9780195502862
4 ‘Anzacs at Gaza,’ Queensland Times, November 22, 1917, 5.
5 I remain your Indarra Friend Will, Postcard, July 6, 1914.
8 Michael McKernan, The Australian People and the Great War, 93

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with supplies thought essential or useful to the AIF troops, allowing them meaningful opportunities to engage in the war effort.

The postcards also reveal the naivety and reality of experiences at war for the AIF troops. From the desert Jim initially wrote that ‘everyone is as happy as Larry’ and ‘spoiling for a scrap’. However, after six days leave from fighting he admitted that the desert ‘hurts by jove’, and hoped they didn’t have to put another 8 months into the war. On another occasion Jim jovially confessed that they haven’t washed for 10 days nor changed clothes in a week, adding that the men stank when they took their boots off.

Due to the distance from the war and the frequency of bad news, mail was much sought after. It could, however, be unreliable. This was a constant source of conversation between Alice and Jim. On one postcard Jim stated that he had received a horrible short letter from Alice complaining that she had not heard from him. He promptly promised to ‘fairly bombard her with mail before the war is over’. Yet in another, Jim revealed that he has heard all mail was to be stopped for some time. Delays were common. On one occasion Jim complained that ‘Jemmy has had rotten luck’: his friend’s mail had taken four months to reach him from home.

Jim was wounded in the war, receiving a gunshot wound to the right eyebrow in 1918, and was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in the field in the following year. He returned to Australia through Fremantle in 1919.

Jim and Alice’s relationship, however, did not survive the war. Jim later married Phyllis O’Neil in 1923. His granddaughter became the Hon. Dr Judith Edwards, the former MLA for Maylands. Jim remained a community member of Beverley, living on his farm Rosewood. Bob Hall, President of the Beverley Historical Society remembers him playing Santa Clause at Christmas time and giving out presents to admiring youngsters. Bob received a cricket bat.

Alice moved to Fremantle and worked at the Fremantle Hotel. She later married Thomas Fowler.

Further Links


Further Reading

‘Anzacs at Gaza,’ Queensland Times, November 22, 1917.


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9 Michael McKernan, The Australian People and the Great War, 74.
14 Jim Edwards, Postcard, March 19, 1916
15 Jim Edwards, Postcard, June 1, 1916

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Edwards, Jim *Postcard*, June 1, 1916. Private collection.


‘Postcards continue to fascinate collectors.’ *Western Morning News*, April 08, 2009.
