



MAJOR DUNCAN CHAPMAN

[1888 – 1916]



Major Chapman is generally acknowledged as being the first Australian to go ashore at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.

Duncan K Chapman was born in Maryborough on 15 May 1888, the third-youngest child of Robert Alexander Chapman (draper) and Eugenie Maud Chapman (nee Humphry). As his mother had died when he was five years old, his older sisters played a central role in raising him and were greatly distraught by his death and remained affected for the rest of their lives.

'Chappie' was educated at Maryborough Boys Grammar School before gaining employment as a paymaster. It seems likely that, based on his service and on his father's address, he moved about Queensland during his early years, including Townsville, Bundaberg, and Brisbane.

Chapman served four years in the militia; six months in the Wide Bay Regiment, six months in the Kennedy Regiment, and three years in the 7th Infantry Regiment.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Great War he volunteered for service in the AIF. He was appointed as Lieutenant, 9th Battalion which was then being formed at Enoggera.

When his boots touched the gravel on the western shore of Gallipoli Peninsular at dawn on 25 April 1915, the 27-year-old platoon commander Lieutenant Duncan Chapman made history as the first man ashore during the Gallipoli Landings, and earned the right for 9th Battalion to proudly refer to itself as *First Ashore*.

In a letter to his brother he said: *In the Trenches, Gallipoli, July 8, 1915. The landing of our troops you no doubt have read about, as full accounts have appeared in all the papers. I happened to be in the first boat that reached the shore, and being in the bow at the time, I was the first man to get*

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ashore. I was one of the covering party who had been chosen to go ahead, and, as our boats sneaked on in the early morning light, many of us wondered who would be, the first to go.

Dr Charles Bean (Australia's Official Historian) later confirmed his conclusion that Chapman was the first man to land, despite conflicting claims probably due to the darkness and confusion.

He was promoted to captain the day after the landing and survived the Gallipoli campaign, despite some confusing and alarming false reports that he had been wounded and then later reported as missing.

As the AIF was expanded on its return to Egypt, Chapman was transferred to 49th Battalion on 25 February 1916 and then to 45th Battalion and promoted to major in mid-March.

In June 1916 Major Chapman arrived on the Western Front with 45th Battalion. 4th Division (of which 45th Battalion was part) was initially rotated through the *Nursery Sector* near Armentieres before moving south in readiness for the Australians' part in the Battle of the Somme.

The intensity, ferocity and duration of the German artillery fire during the Pozieres battles was the heaviest experienced on the Western Front to that time, and required the frequent relief of the troops in the line. 1st Division was relieved by 2nd Division which was later relieved by 4th Division.

45th Battalion went into the line on 5 August as part of the system of reliefs. Chapman was killed almost immediately as he led his company through the trench system towards their planned location in the Pozieres position.

An eyewitness described the circumstances: He was leading into Pozières, saw him killed by a shell, he was hit by the shrapnel and only lived a few minutes – was buried on the top of the trench next morning – he was about 5ft 7in (170cm) high, bit on the gingery side in appearance, was well-liked by the Company, was wearing plain top boots, was fairly well made man, smart in his movements and a good officer.

The exact spot of Major Chapman's death has not been clearly stated but it is believed to be in the vicinity of a point about 400 yards east of Pozieres. He was 28 years old and one of eight United Service Club members killed on the Western Front. He now lies in the Pozieres British Cemetery.

Maryborough Military and Colonial Museum displays a wooden bust of Chapman and the Maryborough community has raised funds for a bronze statue that was unveiled on the eve of Anzac Day 2015.



Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents