

Riverstone – Gallipoli 1915-2009

Linda Graham

It was just by chance that Rosemary Phillis and I were having a chat at a friend's farewell morning tea that she asked where I was going on my next adventure. My reply was "Turkey". I immediately saw Rosemary's eyes brighten and her smile widened. "Linda" she said "Are you by any chance visiting Lone Pine Cemetery in Gallipoli"? My reply was "Yes" it was to be my first day stopover on tour and I expressed how much I was looking forward to visiting such an historical place and walking along the shores of Anzac Cove.

Within two days of our discussion, I had in my possession something incredibly special. Rosemary provided me with a booklet giving personal details of an Australian soldier who lived in Riverstone at the time of signing up for World War 1. The soldier's name is "Archibald Robert Showers". Rosemary explained that Archibald had died in Gallipoli in 1915 and asked if it wasn't too much trouble, would I be able to locate his name on the Great Wall at Lone Pine Cemetery and take a photo for the Riverstone Historical Society.

I took the information home and went through the details page by page. From reading the documents I had a description of what became "my soldier's" height, weight, eye colour, about his family, pay, personal possessions and of how his mother sadly could not accept the fact that he had died in action stating she believed he had become a prisoner of war. I also had a map of where to locate Archibald's name on the Great Wall.

I saw Rosemary a few days later to tell her I would be honoured to take on the task. I took the information to a meeting I had with the group of 13 whom I was travelling with to tell them of my mission to find "my soldier". The group were excited and said that they would assist me in finding Archibald and we decided to make a special tribute in his honour. I didn't realise at this time how humbling and rewarding this experience would be.

On the night before we started the tour I spoke with the tour guide to see if we could have extra time at Lone Pine Cemetery to locate "my soldier". He advised that we could have as much time as necessary... I knew then that I would be running my fingers across Archibald's name on the Great Wall without question the next day.

Early morning I rose, ironed my Australian Flag T Shirt and organised my backpack for the day. I had the necessities, camera, water, lollies etc but I also had some very special treasures to include – the booklet, artificial poppies, a small Australian Flag and a "Lest We Forget" ribbon. When packing my bag my throat tightened, my eyes filled with tears and I thought "Yes... we are coming to visit you today Archibald Robert Showers and your fallen comrades to show you our gratitude and respect".

We travelled for three hours through beautiful country side and as we ventured closer to the region I became more anxious and excited. Our guide was fabulous, he provided excellent commentary on the area and facts associated with the war in Gallipoli.

As we turned off the main road our guide advised we were only a couple of kilometres from Anzac Cove. An immediate silence came over all occupants of the coach. After passing fields of poppies the coach pulled into Anzac Cove and we moved out single file with the Sphinxes on our right side

overlooking the Cove. It was just as I had imagined from listening to and reading stories at school as well as talking to Vets on Anzac Days over the years.

Once we were off the coach, everyone walked in different directions to find their own space. I walked along the footpath reading the plaques which detailed the happenings many years previously. I then headed towards the sandstone wall with the inscription "ANZAC COVE" ... my heart heavy.

I know it may be a strange thing to say but Anzac Cove is a beautiful place. The landing area is flat and pebbled, the bay relatively small with low bush. It was quiet with the only sound being the lapping of the water on the shore and the small birds playing in the nearby bushes. The sky was blue, the sun warm and there was a gentle breeze. When looking from the shore the sphinx loomed above.

On one hand it was easy to visualise what took place at that very spot so many years before and yet on the other I could not but feel how peaceful a place it was and how I could have sat and stayed there for hours.

As I walked along the shore on the rocky pebbles occasionally dipping my hand in the water and looking out to sea, I couldn't but wonder "why". My heart felt heavy and my eyes were full of tears... sadly our boys didn't really stand a chance. The Turkish soldiers would have seen our men coming a mile away. Our soldiers had no protection whilst the enemy at that time, had the ridge for protection. I then walked around the Cove to a small cemetery near the water's edge. The flowers growing between the memorial plaques were beautiful. Roses and geraniums grow perfectly in the climate there. It is here that there is a huge sandstone plaque with the famous inscription:

"THOSE HEROES THAT SHED THEIR BLOOD AND LOST THEIR LIVES ... YOU ARE NOW LYING IN THE SOIL OF A FRIENDLY COUNTRY, THEREFORE REST IN PEACE. THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE JOHNNIES AND MEHMETS TO US WHERE THEY LIE SIDE BY SIDE HERE IN THIS COUNTRY OF OURS... YOU, THE MOTHERS, WHO SENT THEIR SONS FROM FAR AWAY COUNTRIES, WIPE AWAY YOUR TEARS; YOUR SONS ARE NOW LYING IN OUR BOSOM AND ARE IN PEACE AFTER HAVING LOST THEIR LIVES ON THIS LAND THEY HAVE BECOME OUR SONS AS WELL" ATATURK, 1934

We boarded the coach in silence and teary. As we drove up the hill past The Nek and brass statues of soldiers, I could feel the excitement in my stomach and chest.

Upon arriving at Lone Pine, our guide without warning, asked me to come to the front of the coach to share with the group something special. I walked up the aisle full of emotion. He handed me the microphone and my first words were "Archibald Robert Showers". In speaking those three words, tears flowed and I struggled with words but finally managed to give information on this courageous soldier. As I walked back to my seat to collect the treasures, hands touched my arms and legs in comfort and when I looked up I could see that all my travelling colleagues were reduced to tears.

We alighted from the coach and in an instant I was surrounded by 43 people assuring me that we would find "my soldier". From that moment Archibald Robert Showers became "our soldier". I found it extremely difficult to stop the tears.

We walked into the cemetery high up on the hill overlooking Anzac Cove. The view was absolutely magnificent, a wonderful spot for our heroes to rest in peace. The Lone Pine stood to the left of the cemetery and was providing shade to a large group of Turkish people who too had come, to visit our lost soldiers.

I headed straight for the Great Wall along with a few others from the group to find Archibald's name. I was part way to the wall when suddenly I heard a woman call me saying "He is here Linda, come quick". I turned and ran back feeling extremely excited to think that Archibald had been honoured with his own plaque, my heart jumped with glee.

We all gathered around and decorated Archibald's plaque with poppies, the ribbon, and the Australian flag. One of the men from the group placed his grandfather's war medal and our group organiser scattered gum leaves around the memorial. Everyone gathered around and we all gave thanks to Archibald Robert Showers for his courage and patriotism to his country.

I sat behind the decorated plaque feeling totally overwhelmed. I cried for Archibald and all the soldiers who lay with him. I could have sat there for hours.

Lone Pine is a relatively small cemetery and it has a feel of peacefulness. The roses and flowers growing there are colourful; the lawn is green and well maintained. The Great Wall made of sandstone blocks is clean and bright, standing high and strong at the end of cemetery. To my absolute delight, there were scattered red poppies poking out amongst the rocks around the perimeter. I now have a better understanding of the significance of the "Red Poppy".

We had a group photo taken at the Lone Pine sign... we all wore our Australian T-shirts and had a large Australian Flag. At that moment, high up on the hill in this incredible surrounding, my thoughts went home to my family and friends. I thanked God I was born and raised in Australia and felt extremely humble ... we are so lucky!!!

After leaving Lone Pine and over the course of the following two weeks, I was approached by people travelling with me expressing their thanks and gratitude for sharing that wonderful day with them. They said it was an experience they will never forget.

In my wildest dreams I would not have thought that my chance meeting with Rosemary Phillis that day would result in one of the most heartfelt and memorable days of my life. I feel so honoured and humbled to have travelled half way across the world to find one of Riverstone's lost heroes.

Over the past 20 years, I have attended dawn services on Anzac Day. Each year I stand with others and remember those who fought in the war. Each year I shed tears of sadness in remembrance. Anzac Day 2010 will be, I am sure, even more special as I will be able to reflect upon that day at Anzac Cover and Lone Pine, the day I met, thanked and gave tribute to Archibald Robert Showers.





Lone Pine Cemetery.



Linda Graham at Archibald's grave.



A view from the Lone Pine Cemetery.

Photos: Linda Graham.