

**CHAPTER 1**

**FORMATION OF 10th AUSTRALIAN  
FIELD AMBULANCE**

The original 10th Australian Field Ambulance was formed in March 1916 along with two others, the 9th, and the 11th, when it was decided to form a third Australian Division as part of the expeditionary force to serve overseas. The infantry battalions forming the new Division were the 37th, 38th and 39th.

The history of the 10th Field Ambulance during the first world war has been documented by their Commanding Officer, Lieut. Colonel J.S. Purdy but a brief outline will not be out of place here.



*Mule Drawn Ambulance used by unit in France. (Courtesy of Ron Woff)*

There were other medical units being formed at the same time such as C.C.S.'s (Casualty Clearing Stations) and the early days were disrupted by officers and often a group of hand picked men being transferred to other units. They had three different Commanding Officers before Lieut. Colonel J.S. Purdy took over just prior to embarkation for France. It seems that only basic military training was received in Victoria, mainly at the Showgrounds, Ascot Vale.

The unit embarked under command of Major Kenny in several different transports, one of which was the *Runic*. They arrived in England in August 1916. The unit settled down to serious medical training on the Salisbury Plains and were ordered to France in November under command of Lieut. Colonel Purdy.

They went almost immediately into action on the Western Front and remained in action with brief rest periods until the armistice on the 11th November, 1918. The unit was with other troops comprising the 4th Australian Division and their area allotted was just south of Armentieres. During one of their rest periods they assisted the local French farmers at Campagnetti to bring in the harvest, in which operation their horses and wagons were extremely useful. The Mayor of St. Martin-Choquel sent the Commanding Officer a letter of appreciation for their assistance.

One thing is very obvious and that is that the 10th Field Ambulance in the first World War served under very different conditions to that under which the unit served in the second World War.

In France the opposing armies were both entrenched in a long line from the English Channel to the Swiss border with the notorious "No Man's Land" in between. Periodically the men of either side would be ordered "over the top" to try to dislodge the enemy. Which ever side initiated the attack always suffered severe casualties as the defenders took their toll of the unprotected assault troops. In addition to the danger of enemy rifles and machine guns our troops were subjected to constant attacks of the deadly mustard gas.

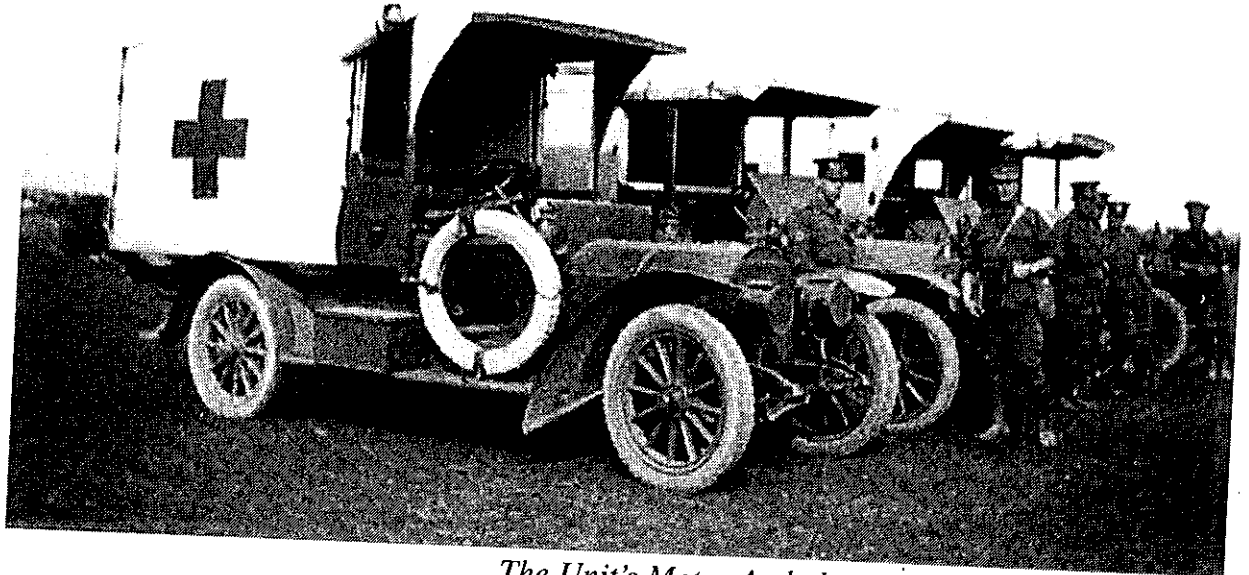
The main battles in which the unit was engaged were the battles of Messines in 1917 and the battle of the Somme in 1918.

Their members earned a number of decorations including three D.S.O.'s, three Military Crosses, three Distinguished Conduct Medals, one Bar to D.C.M., one Military Service Medal, thirty five Military Medals and one bar to the Military Medal. Their casualties were high with 22 killed in action, 14 died of wounds, 4 others died, making a total of forty dead plus 76 wounded and 34 gassed.

At the end of the 1914-18 war the unit returned to Australia and like all other A.I.F. units was disbanded.

Ron Woff's father served with the original 10th Field Ambulance in WW1. After the war an Association was formed called the 10th Field Ambulance Association and regular reunions were held.

After the Second World War and the formation of the 10th Field Ambulance Association (A.I.F.), liaison took place between the two associations and repre-



*The Unit's Motor Ambulances. (Courtesy of Ron Woff)*

representatives of each would be invited to the respective reunions. In 1972 the President of our Association, Dr. Mick Dunn and Ron Woff attended. Their remark afterwards was, "What a remarkable bunch of chaps they are!" the youngest 72 and the oldest 89 years. There were about forty present and they made Mick and Ron very welcome and they showed that they were still a "good judge of a glass". Again in 1979 Mick Dunn was guest at the unit's 60th anniversary reunion. Sadly, there were only twelve members present plus three guests, including Mick. In 1981 after their 62nd reunion the decision was taken to disband because so few members remained alive and the following notice appeared in "Mufti".

### **10th Field Ambulance Bows Out**

With sadness we learn that the 10th Field Ambulance Association, 1st A.I.F. is winding up in view of the very few number of surviving members.

The Association's honorary secretary, Roy Werner said the decision was made at the 62nd Annual Meeting when members reluctantly accepted the inevitable - "fading away". "We were a very happy unit and have enjoyed good fellowship and unforgettable memories of the many years we served together in 1914-1918", Mr Werner added.