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**Militan's War
And
Other Hurdles**

Michael John Oldham

Introduction

Militan Schatkowski, my paternal grandfather, served as a Russian Anzac during WWI and this month, November 2014, marks the centenary of his enlistment. Before Armistice Day he had changed his name to Militan Oldham.

I never met him because he died ten years before my birth and my father, Joseph Milton Oldham [known as Joe], had no recollection of ever being in his father's presence and knew extremely little about him. In childhood, from the point of becoming aware that every child has two sets of grandparents, I was naturally curious about not only my paternal grandfather, but also my grandmother, Isabella Oldham and, likewise, Joe's sister, Cecily. Briefly my understanding of the situation went something like this. My father remembered seeing a photograph, when very young, of a soldier wearing a bush hat; his father possibly. Joe and Cecily were raised apart. Isabella died circa early 1930s and I understand Joe remembered attending her funeral and standing at her graveside with Cecily. They were then taken their separate ways.

Joe joined the British Royal Navy straight from school. WWII came and in October 1940 his boat was torpedoed and sunk; for him that war was over and he spent the rest of it in German POW camps. I also understand that after repatriation he tried to establish links with his sister, even getting to her front door, but nothing came of it. That therefore was the situation until 1997; myself and my siblings knowing nothing of our father's side of the family and, without a doubt, never seeing any photographs of paternal kin.

Still no photos but in 1997 a sister of mine managed to obtain a file of Militan's papers from the Australian military and what a revelation they were. Previous to this Joe had not the slightest inkling of a Russian link.

With these papers plus a few other pieces that subsequently surfaced it has been possible to gain some idea of what Militan had been up to along his life's path albeit mainly during the WWI years.

Enlistment

Having arrived in Australia around July 1914 Militan had been staying in the Newcastle suburb of Stockton, NSW at the time of his enlistment, November 30th of that year. He presented, at the Liverpool enlistment centre as a, just over twenty-three year old, five-foot-nine-and-a half-inch, fourteen stone specimen of early twentieth century manhood. A Presbyterian who could expand his chest from thirty-five-and-a-half inches to forty-one; his complexion was fair as was his hair; and eyes of blue. There was an unspecified tattoo on each arm.

His Medical examination was conducted by Captain C. Lawes who probably felt he was working on a production line while the examinees were no doubt contemplating what the great adventure that was World War 1 would throw at them.

Militan's 'Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad', and other military documentation, indicate that he was born in what is today Lithuania; parish of Kovnono near the town of Pratile in Baltic Country on November 20th 1891. He wasn't, nor ever had been, an apprentice, he wasn't married at that time and his trade or calling was that of seaman. A later document expanded on this and it became known that during the four months he had lived in Australia, prior to enlistment, he was employed as a ship's fireman on the Australian coast.

My grandfather took the oath and swore to 'truly serve our Sovereign King in the Australian Imperial Forces from 30th November 1914 until the end of the War and a further period of four months thereafter' unless something happened to end his military career earlier. Militan became Private 1632

Voyage to Egypt

The next significant date in Militan's march to war was February 11th 1915 when he went back to sea. This time as part of a detachment of about 160 AIF 2nd Battalion, 3rd Reinforcement soldiers along with a great many other Anzacs that sailed out of Sydney Harbour, from a pier at Woolloomooloo, on board HMAT *Seang Choon* [A49] for, at that time, an undisclosed destination. The ship belonged to a company in Rangoon, weighed a little under 6000 tons, chugged along at 12 knots and, being torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Ireland in 1917, didn't survive the war.

They arrived at Brisbane two days later where a sister ship, HMAS *Seang Bee* [A48] was already alongside. More troops arrived for onward passage and provisions and cargo were taken aboard. The ships sailed in the evening of the same day, February 13th 1915, to refrains of Auld Lang Syne patriotically belted out by passengers and crew on the upper decks and quayside well wishers alike.

Life on board included some military activity; bayonets were issued and fixing and use of, practiced, for instance. While still sailing along Australia's east coast it was very hot, sea flat calm and flying fish entertained. There were also reportedly, good views of the Great Barrier Reef and the many pretty islands thereabouts.

On February 18th the serenity was disturbed somewhat. A48 ran aground on a sandbank. A49 tried to pull her clear but snapped several towlines in the process. Eventually, with help from government launches out of Thursday Island, A48 was successfully refloated soon after breakfast on Saturday, the 20th, with no damage sustained. Both ships were moored at Thursday Island by 4.00 pm and, apparently, at 6.00 pm all hands went ashore with most returning drunk.

The equator was crossed at 0100 hrs on March 6th with King Neptune, his retinue and court, paying a visit at a presumably more sociable hour later in the day. Colombo was reached on March 8th for a two day stop during which there was a crew change.

Aden was passed, and the Red Sea entered, on March 17th with A49 still sailing in company with A48. They docked at the port of Suez on March 23rd where trains were waiting to take the troops up country with Cairo their final destination on that part of the adventure.

Deployment Overseas

Militan's time, while on deployment from Australia, can be roughly divided into four geographic segments, Egypt, Turkey---- Gallipoli, France and England.

Old military written records are not easily deciphered from their original format but it seems to be the case that Militan arrived at a reinforcement camp at Anzac Cove, on the Gallipoli Peninsular, from Egypt, about October 3rd 1915. He then arrived back at Alexandria, Egypt aboard the Hospital Ship [HS] *Gloucester Castle* on December 9th, about a month prior to the end of the Gallipoli campaign and evacuation of the peninsular.

Militan's 1916 movements are far from clear. It has not been possible to establish precisely, from his army records, when he moved on from Egypt but they show he was in France in September 1916. Possibly he was in England for a period between Egypt and France. While in France he transferred to the 54th battalion in October 1916 then back to the 2nd less than two months later.

What is clearer is that on February 5th 1917 he arrived in England, aboard HS *Glenuce Castle*, where he remained 'til repatriation back to Australia in June 1919.

Overseas Health and Disciplinary Matters

Two features of Militan's military papers which tend to stand out are his medical and disciplinary records. It is unlikely anybody could suggest he was a model soldier and keep a straight face. His medical record is particularly unenviable.

On initial inspection of his 'Army Form B. 103' of the WWI era, 'Casualty Form ---- Active Service' one might expect to read of war wounds; embedded shrapnel, bullets that came perilously close, that sort of thing. Not Militan Schatkowski apparently. Though in and out of hospital on a regular basis none of his inflictions seem, from the papers issued by the Australian Archives, to have their roots on the battlefield. Pyrexia, Pubic Dermatitis and complaints of the venereal kind feature and on the very day he arrived in England, February 5th 1917, his leg was broken.

He amassed considerable experience of many hospitals some of them mere field facilities while others were substantially grander such as the Australian General Hospital [AGH] at Lunar Park, Heliopolis in Cairo. Lunar Park? No, not an affectionate label to remind the long-way-from-home Anzac boys of home; there really was a Cairo Lunar Park, a western style funny fair which was requisitioned by the military authorities and became an AGH of over 1200 beds.

In September 1916, within a day of arriving in France it seems he found himself in hospital in the northern French town of Etaples. A relatively small town pre WWI it ballooned into a giant 'hospital city' during, and because of it.

In London after breaking his leg he was admitted to an orthopaedic facility at York Place Military Hospital and after four days transferred to Shepherds Bush Orthopaedic. From there he was discharged, in mid May 1917, to Weymouth. Though the records to hand don't appear to say so it is not unreasonable, in the circumstances, to assume this was for convalescence.

To deviate for a moment, Weymouth is a seaside resort in the County of Dorset on England's south coast. During WWI it hosted many recuperating Anzacs; over 105,000 by the end of the war. According to the BBC, 'The young women of Weymouth found the Australians particularly appealing, as they were generally bigger, fitter and much better paid than British troops. Fifty weddings eventually followed as a result of this "fraternising with the locals"'.

Eighty-six Anzacs never made it home and lie in two local cemeteries. Every April 25th Weymouth observes Anzac Day with a service at their Anzac memorial close to the beach.

My earliest memories of my father, Joe, are of being taken to the local railway, by my mother to meet him in the early 1950s. He would be coming home for weekend leaves from Weymouth where he was serving at the Portland naval shore base.

In 1940 the sinking of his small naval craft by the German navy occurred off the Dorset coast very close to Weymouth.

As I sit here now, writing, I am approximately a one hour drive from Weymouth, where Militan walked 97 years ago.

His stay at Weymouth lasted a little over a month and on June 16th, it is recorded, he was detached for duty with AIF Admin. HQ, London, from Weymouth. A short while later it seems he was reshuffled again; this time to a temporary attachment with the Australian Red Cross at 7-10 Old Bailey, London EC, a role he may have kept 'til the end of the war and maybe even beyond that. There is a note in his records, dated March 28th 1918, that states, 'Red Cross Society shows still at Old Bailey'.

Now to the ignominious question of Private 1632's poor AIF disciplinary record. It seems to have peaked during a twelve month period from about August 1915. The first incident of note involved him avoiding embarkation, being drunk and creating a disturbance for which he was awarded 21 days detention. This was served between September 7th and 28th 1915 at Mustapha Barracks, Alexandria.

Next time he was AWOL for fifteen minutes; 10 'til 10.15pm one night in mid December 1915. Possibly due to being challenged by authority for poor timekeeping, using insulting language to an officer was added to the charge sheet. 168 hours detention was the penalty awarded.

Then it was the fake document affair. At 2400 hrs on June 19th 1916 he returned to base, after being AWOL since 2400 hrs the previous day, and found to be in possession of a fake passport. This time it was seven days and forfeiture of one day's pay.

Despite the scrapes Militan managed to get himself into it is not thought he was rampant bolshie. There was a more mellow, more benevolent side to his character that occasionally revealed itself. In February 1916, for example, he arranged an allotment of 3/- per diem [daily] to Joseph Schatkowski of,

Room 8, 84 Gooritzkya Oolitz, Petrograd, Russia.

He explained that the allottee, his father, was dependent on whatever he could send him. In the circumstances it could not be that straightforward a transaction. It was requested that the Russian Ambassador or Consul in London be paid the money for transmission to Militan's father in what today is St Petersburg. This matter concludes, in the records, with the Captain Staff Paymaster telling the Official Secretary at the High Commissioner's Office, London that he would be glad to be advised whether the allotment could be given effect. It is not known whether it was given effect so whether Joseph Schatkowski got his money, or not, must remain a mystery, for the time being at least.

Name Change

As 1918 dawned significant changes to Militan's personal circumstance were queuing just over the horizon. In February he set about the process of changing his name which required a solemn declaration. This included details of his former address [Stockton, Newcastle, NSW] and current situation / occupation; 'now of the AIF 2nd Battalion, Regimental number 1632 attached to the Australian Red Cross in London'. He provided his birth details and stated that both his parents were natural born Russian subjects.

Other issues covered his time in Australia prior to embarkation and acknowledging that he had no land, property or other obligations in the country. The written version of his declaration indicates that he had been on active service since the day of his enlistment, November 30th 1914 and been with the British Expeditionary Force in France from September 16th 1916 to February 5th 1917. He also declared that he had been employed on the Administrative Headquarters AIF since June 18th 1917.

He then gave his reason for the action thus: 'I am desirous that my name should be changed in all records to Militan Oldham, it being my intention to marry a natural born English subject and I desire to have an English name as I have been a resident of the British Empire for now 10 years and I have no desire to return to Russia.'

His declaration concluded with him saying that he had made the solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and by virtue to the provisions of the Statutory Declarations 1835. Yes, it was all done properly and by the book. Letters were written including one from the Officer I / C Records at AIF London, enclosing a copy of Militan's signed declaration, to Melbourne. It reported that all necessary action had been taken in the London office in accordance with KR para 1901.

Who was the lucky lady? She was, to give her full name as per birth certificate, Isabella Burgess Haugh Oldham who was born at Manchester, North West England, on August 14th 1891. She was a nursing sister which seems to suggest a smart move on Militan's part.

1935 Sydney Declaration

To again deviate slightly, Militan Oldham was to make another solemn declaration while residing at 13A Bethal Lane, Paddington, NSW in 1935. In April that year he wrote to The Base Commandant at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne to, 'respectfully beg to apply for a copy of his discharge AIF having lost the originals some time ago'. He said he was having difficulty getting work because of this and had advertised for the original but couldn't get any trace of it. He provided his correct date of enlistment but erred with his battalion number, writing it as the 4th. He gave his date of returning to Australia as July 28th 1919 and that of discharge, September 28th of the same year. He finished by 'trusting for an early reply'. Of course it can't be certain that he actually wrote the letter himself or was written, on his behalf by another party.

On May 17th 1935 he presented himself before a Commissioner for Declarations, Mr J Bombelli JP. He declared who he was, his military details and that he had lost his original discharge. The circumstances under which the said loss occurred he said were, 'about two years ago my wallet containing my discharge and other valuable papers was stolen'. He swore that the loss was unavoidable and, to the best of his knowledge' and belief, the lost papers were not in the hands of any other person. Finally he stated that he made the solemn declaration by virtue of the Statutory Declarations Act 1911, conscientiously believing the statement contained therein to be true in every particular. It is not known whether a duplicate discharge was issued.

Marriage and Naturalisation

The wedding took place on December 5th 1918 at Holborn Registry Office in London. Militan's address was given as 97 High Holborn, London and Isabella's; Arnot Hill Military Hospital, Nottingham some 130 miles from London. Interestingly Militan's father Joseph was apparently deceased by this time and his name on the marriage certificate is Joseph Oldham. Did Joseph go through a name change I wonder or did Militan arrange things to look like a quite ordinary case of father and son having the same surname? If one is inclined to speculate they must decide which of the two is the most likely explanation or come up with possible alternatives.

The ceremony was witnessed by Joseph H Beal and J Ford Tassie. Given the known circumstances it is not unreasonable to assume that no family members of either bride or groom were present. At my father's [Militan's son] registry office wedding in 1947 no family members from either side were in attendance ditto my [Militan's grandson] registry office wedding in 1972.

The March 4th, 1919, edition of the London Gazette formally announced that Militan Oldham had become a naturalised British subject having taken the Oath of Allegiance early in 1919. Therefore he had changed his name and nationality and got married and all while on active service; quite a year!

Some Recently Acquired Papers

Recently some more papers concerning Militan came my way. Their source: Dr Elena Govor. The first document to arrive was a City of Antwerp Police Official Warrant of Arrest [dated February 26th 1912] a standard registration form used in the processing of aliens stranded in the city with no existence means. The form indicates that Militan was then a seaman so it might be he was held in custody for a short while until seagoing employment, on a ship heading out of Antwerp, could be secured.

The form holds great value not only for those with interest in the Schatkowski family but as a historical document in its own right. ‘The tramps of overseas countries must be brought before the police court’, it advises the official dealing with the question which asks the respondent their nationality. Militan’s nationality, as written on the form, is anything but clear but whatever the blob was trying to convey, in reply to another question, he declared he was not in Belgium due to having to leave his own country because of wrongdoing.

From the form it is adequately clear that Militan’s last place of residence in a foreign country was at *undecipherable* Strasse, Number 96, Bremerhaven.

Following his POW stint in WWII Joe was posted back to Germany, to the naval base at Wilhelmshaven accompanied by his wife. The first year of my life was spent in Wilhelmshaven and I was there again on my first trip to sea in 1965.

Bremerhaven, where Militan walked 102 years ago, is just across the bay from Wilhelmshaven.

Details of Militan's parents were required by Antwerp police. He gave his father's name as Josef Schatkowski; so far so good. His mother's name though, previously understood to be Olga Schatkowski, he gave as Hürschulle Gerdt, a German sounding name. There appears to me to be a 'Deutschland' in the reply to this question which also asked for parent's birthplaces.

If this observation is correct, and I wouldn't be offended if anyone indicated otherwise, interesting possibilities arise as other references to Deutschland appear to appear in other replies on the Antwerp Police registration form. Militan's birthplace would be Plotely, Deutschland as would his father's. Furthermore his reply to a question about papers in his possession also appears to include Deutschland. Whatever the paper, it is dated August 5th 1911.

Two Ocean Voyages

Other recent papers concern two ocean voyages the first on an easterly course and the other westerly. One document is a cutting from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of Wednesday, July 9th 1919, reporting that SS *Bremen* was on passage for NSW, from England, with returning Anzacs and dependents. Militan Oldham's name can be found in the, 'The following soldiers have embarked with their wives', paragraph, immediately below that listing soldiers who were travelling with a wife and two children. Isabella was pregnant at the time with Cecily Olga who was born at Paddington NSW on February 11th 1920.

The westward sea passage was made by the *Konigin Luise*, a former German ocean liner which had been handed to Great Britain as war reparation in April 1919. When she arrived at the Port of London, after a voyage from the Antipodes, on Boxing Day 1920 she was being operated by the British ship-owner, Orient Line. She had brought two Oldhams back from Sydney, Isabella and nine month old Cecily Olga. Isabella was pregnant at the time with Joseph Milton who was born at the Forest Gate Sick Home, London on July 21st 1921.

Militan remained in Australia and there is nothing to suggest that he ever travelled outside the country again.

It is felt Forest Gate Sick Home is worthy of mention as it played an integral part in the wider Militan story. Formerly a workhouse, administered under relief of the poor legislation, it reopened in 1913 as Forest Gate Sick Home.

Accommodation was provided for the chronic sick, together with 50 mentally handicapped adults and 25 mentally handicapped children, including epileptics. From the time of its reopening some maternity patients were admitted and their number grew steadily. By 1930 the Home had a dedicated maternity unit with 64 lying in beds.

It would be nice to know that Isabella's link to the home had something to do with her Nursing Sister status and things were going reasonably well for her. Based on the information to hand though, it would be a risky assumption to make with any confidence.

Three months were to pass before the birth was registered on October 20th 1921 and then it was not by Isabella but W O'Farrel, 'Occupier of Forest Gate Sick Home, Forest Gate. On the birth certificate the father's name is Milton Oldham and the mother's; Isabel Oldham formerly Oldham.

ALO's Book

In the year 2000, with curiosity whetted by a *Daily Mail* review, I bought a copy of a newly published book, 'Stoned' by Andrew Loog Oldham. Brief media comments printed on the outer back cover included the following [both Q Magazine]:

- i) 'Andrew Loog Oldham was nineteen years old when he discovered and became the manager and producer of an unknown band called The Rolling Stones. His radical vision transformed them from a penniless South London blues combo to the greatest rock 'n' roll band in the world. Ultra-hip, flash, brash and steeped in Sixties style, he was a hustler of genius, addicted to notoriety and innovation.'

- ii) 'George Melly memorably describes Oldham as "calculatedly vicious and nasty, but pretty as a stoat."'

Then to the front cover; open it and set about assessing the credibility of my *Daily Mail* book review inspired hunch. Page 1, with mention of Andrew's mother Celia, was promising; page 2, where Celia had become Cecilia Olga, and 3 which displayed a photograph of a young Celia strongly, strongly confirmed that hunch credibility was high.

As a teenager at school during the early 1960s who took notice of the popular music scene I knew that the Rolling Stone's manager, who always wore sunglasses when photographed, had the same family name as me but the possibility we shared a granddad never crossed my mind. Having, since 2000, scoured many books and magazines featuring images of Andrew I know that he bears a striking resemblance to my father, Joe particularly in the fair hair and complexion area. I think he looks more like my father than either me or my brother.

Andrew was born [or as he put it ----- shot out] on January 29th 1944 in Paddington Hospital, London. Militar Schatkowski gets an early mention, in his book, as Celia's father an Ashkenazi Jew born in Plotaly, Kovno, Russia who ended up in New South Wales. There are spelling variations and factual errors in Andrew's account but there are valid explanations for that. His sole source of information was his mother where mine was, my father. Whatever the errors and gaps etc. the versions are close enough to be confident that Militan and Militar are one and the same, person.

It would not be practical to analyse everything Andrew wrote about his birth family here but there are a few points I think should not, not be told at this juncture. First, he had no knowledge of his maternal grandmother which he put down to his mother's reticence. His mother never mentioned her mother so to Andrew his grandmother was not just somebody without a name or face but someone who simply never was. This idea can be transposed to my position. Militan was a grandfather with no face [no photographs] and no name until 1997.

Once, when he was aged about nine Andrew asked Cecily Olga, his mother, what had happened to her brother, Joseph Milton, my father. Though put out by the question she said that she had not got on with her brother very well before WWII so there hadn't been any point in finding out whether he had survived it. When Joe arrived on his sister's doorstep soon after WWII ended, and getting no further, she must have known that he had survived yet was claiming simultaneously there was no point in trying to find out. Both accounts cannot be true. After reading the book and taking account of Andrew's date of birth and when hostilities ceased it is quite feasible that while Joe was on the doorstep, Andrew, then of toddler age, was inside the house. They may well have got that close.

As Joe had memories of seeing the photograph of an apparent Anzac Andrew recalls his mother having a picture of a young man in naval uniform.

Finally, from Stoned, is Andrew's understanding of what occurred in 1920. He believed it to be 1923 and that Joe had been born in Sydney, not London. He says that his 'mother's mother gathered her brood together and shipped off for England, leaving a bemused culture baffled Militar horizontal at the Sydney race track; for him the race was over.

Death in the Family

Sadly Joseph Milton Oldham, my father, died on June 17th 2000 a day or two following acquisition of cousin Andrew's book so he didn't get to see the photo of his sister Cecily Olga Oldham. It was however a blessing that Militan's military records had been acquired three years prior to Joe's passing giving him time to scrutinise, and come to terms with, them.

Sadly his sister Cecily Olga Oldham followed him on January 28th 2002.

Equally sadly Militan Oldham [formerly Schatkowski] died on November 29th 1938 at 13 Gipps Street, Paddington, Sydney. The Informant was M E Rope [no relation] of the same address. The causes of death included, Alcoholism [acute]. He went to his grave as Milton Schatkowski [known as Milton Oldham]. Burial was the following day at Rockwood Roman Catholic Cemetery with Peter A Smith, a Roman Catholic priest and witnesses of burial, A M Gilbert and G Robinson in attendance. His birthplace, on the death certificate was given as Lutania, Russia and he had been in NSW for 'about 24 years'. Spot on!

The last entry on the certificate is, Place of Marriage and to whom. The response, 'not married'.

Some Closing Thoughts

When looking into the life of a character such as Militan further questions are sure to arise at every turn of the page. For me such questions yet to be answered include the uncertainty surrounding his mother's identity. Given the evidence available I am inclined to side with the Olga Schatkowski alternative but then that raises the question of why he should tell the Belgian police in 1912 otherwise? Given his documented moves in 1919 to possibly settle in England could it be that in 1912 he was toying with the idea of possibly settling in Germany? A German mother would have been helpful if this were the case.

More details of his ten years in the British Empire would be welcome. When did he first become a seaman? Did he sail on any British ships? If so a name of a ship would be helpful for seeking the records of his Merchant Navy phase. Did he ever become an Australian citizen; and so on?

From down-and-out status and a police cell in 1912 Antwerp to what looks almost certain to have been a pauper's funeral on the other side of the world in 1938 Militan encountered many hurdles throughout his lifetime. If the knife edge of active service at Gallipoli and the Western Front in The Great War; The War To End All Wars, were not enough he also found time for a grand tour of detention quarters and VD clinics. Then alcoholism and an early demise. His is a sad story.

Forest Gate Sick Home doesn't sound like a bed of roses or, for that matter, a Lunar Park type facility. Though not there in person it is plainly linked to his family history. Andrew's 'for him the race is over' [i.e. flat out at the Sydney racetrack] comment does nothing to counter the sad story conclusion.

While preparing this piece I have had to deal with Ira Hayes frequently popping into my mind. Though not precision paralleling both men's stories evoke similar sentiments deep within the nerve centre of my being.

The Western Front, Gallipoli and Iwo Jima [650 nautical miles south of mainland Japan where Ira was one of the six who raised the US flag after defeating Nippon in WWII], all had especially high fatality rates. Ira had difficulty coping with post war life and suffered a premature demise. It has been said he, 'died drunk early one morning in the land he fought to save...'. .

Two very sad stories.

Rest in Peace Militan and may your descendents live in peace and always remember they are Oldhams, of the former Schatkowski variety.

To end on a positive note, it ought never be forgotten that Private 1632 Oldham [formerly Schatkowski] exceeded his commitment, solemnly entered into on November 30th 1914, to serve 'til the end of WWI plus four months, by an honourable margin. **Bravo!**

Sources

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