

THE BORELLA RIDE

The Story of Albert Borella VC MM, a Territory Hero

Albert Chalmers Borella was born on 7 August 1881. His family lived in the small farming community of Borung, located about 200 kilometres north of Melbourne.

Albert Borella was the first son for Louis and Annie née Chalmers. He was the middle child between older sister Elizabeth and younger sister Annie Aurora. Albert's mother Annie died of scarlet fever in 1885 when Albert was only four. His father remarried and had five more children.

In later years Borella changed his surname to Chalmers-Borella to honour his mother's family connections.

Borella was educated at local schools in Borung and Wychitella, and grew up helping his father on the farm. As a young man he farmed in the district and served for 18 months with the Victorian Rangers Militia regiment. In 1910 Borella left the family farm to join the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade.



Borella on the Daly. Albert Borella 4th from left second back row. 1913, Borella Collection.

Borella had been working there for nearly three years when, together with his mates Ronald Parker and Albert Lewis, they read a pamphlet advertising farming land in a place called Daly River in the Northern Territory. By 1913 the Commonwealth had established experimental farms at Batchelor and the Daly River and needed workers. Leases were offered rent free with promises of cheap loans, equipment and subsidised transport. On 17 January 1913 Borella handed in his resignation and together with his mates Ronald Parker and Albert Lewis booked their passage on the SS St Albans and arrived in Darwin on 24 February.

Parker & Borella went to work at the Batchelor experimental farm (Lewis subsequently losing interest in farming) and in April, after being advised that they had won a block on the Daly River in the Land Ballot, they set off for the Daly. By November Parker had had enough and pulled out of the lease.

At the end of 1913 after months of negotiating with the Land Board, Borella took up Block 9 in the Hundred of Hawkshaw on the Daly River.

With both partners gone, Borella found skilled Aboriginal workmen and together they spent the next 10 months building, clearing, fencing and digging. Despite many challenges, Borella was able to build what the Land Council admitted was "the best house on the Daly". However, with no income and the promised equipment not arriving, Borella went into debt.

In August 1914, Britain and her Dominions including India, Canada, Australia and New Zealand entered what was to become known as the Great War. Borella wanted to enlist but his signed agreement meant he had to stay on the block. In October 1914 he went to Darwin to attempt to negotiate the discharge of his lease, but instead found work as a cook for a survey party travelling to Tennant Creek. The government threatened legal action when they realised he had walked off the block – but Borella was out of reach. He stuck to the job but by January 1915 he'd had enough.

The story of Borella's Wet Season journey from Tennant Creek to Darwin is now the chronicle of legend.

Albert Borella set off in the harsh Territory climate by foot, walking with his Aboriginal companion Charlie from Tennant Creek to Renner Springs, at times swimming flooded creeks. Borella then rode on alone by horseback to Katherine, hitched a ride to Pine Creek on a horse-drawn mail coach, and caught the train from Pine Creek to Darwin.

It was February 1915 when Borella reached the northern capital. After paying off his debts he was destitute and had to borrow the fare to travel to Townsville to enlist as the Commonwealth Government was not accepting recruits from the Northern Territory.

On 8 March 1915, to the sound of cheering crowds Borella and others departed Darwin on the SS Aldenham.

On 15 March 1915, Borella enlisted as Private No. 275 with the Australian Imperial Force. Less than two weeks later he was posted to the 26th Battalion.

Borella served nearly four years with the 26th Battalion, including at



Volunteering for active service 'Sailing from Darwin to Townsville on SS Aldenham to enlist in the First World War. Five of the first fifteen Territorians who volunteered for active service. Standing L-R: Lieutenant Albert Borella No. 275 26th Infantry Battalion VC MM, Lieutenant Robert Dingwall Buttercase No. 1376 41st Battery KIA 5 April 1918; Private James Park, No. 688 13th Light Horse, 1st reinforcements; Private James Lawrence Cain No. 2040 9th Battalion, 5th Reinforcement KIA 20 April 1916; Private Frank Thomson No. 2057 9th Battalion, 5th Reinforcement. 8 March 1915, NT Library Darwin 1914-1916 Collection.



Gallipoli where he was promoted to Corporal. Following the Gallipoli evacuation Borella trained in Egypt before embarking for France and service in the trenches of the Western Front.

In July 1916 he was injured in action, receiving a gunshot wound to the upper right arm, and was treated for this both locally and then in England. He was promoted to Sergeant in January 1917 and in March that year, Borella was awarded the Military Medal for devotion to duty and general good work in the trenches:

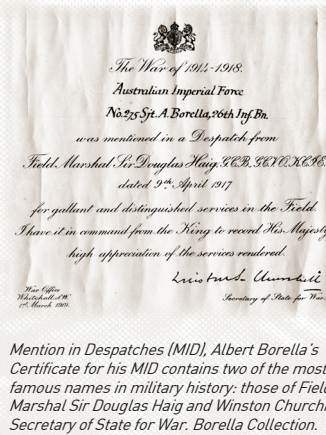
For conspicuous bravery in action. This Sergeant in the attack on Malt Trench, north of Warlencourt on the night of the 1st/2nd March, 1917, did splendid work. After taking a leading part in the furious fighting on the right of the Battalion objective he assisted Lieutenant Ward in reorganising the men and consolidating the line. Throughout he displayed the greatest coolness and devotion to duty. Commonwealth Gazette No.140, 27 August 1917

He was commissioned in April as a 2nd Lieutenant. Borella received a Mention in Despatches in Sir Douglas Haig's communication of 9 April, a great honour and indicative of his excellent work as a soldier.

Service with a training battalion in France followed until November 1917 when Borella, now a 1st Lieutenant, re-joined the 26th at the front.



Albert Borella
THE BORELLA RIDE



C Company, 26th Battalion, First Australian Imperial Force. Private Albert Borella, known as "Bert", 1st front row sitting. 1915, Borella Collection.

In early 1918 the Battalion fought many tough battles across the bomb-scarred wilderness of the Front. During one of these later fights, near Villers-Bretonneux on 17-18 July, Borella was leading his platoon forward against German opposition including a German machinegun which was firing at the advancing Australians through the Australians' own artillery barrage.

His later Victoria Cross citation read:

For most conspicuous of bravery in attack. Whilst leading his platoon with the first wave, Lieutenant Borella marked an enemy machine gun firing through our barrage. He ran out ahead of his men into the barrage, shot two German machine gunners with his revolver, and captured the gun. He then led his party, now reduced to ten men and two Lewis guns, against a very strongly held trench, using his revolver, and later a rifle, with great effect, causing many enemy casualties. His leading and splendid example resulted in the garrison being quickly shot and captured. Two large dug outs were also bombed, and thirty prisoners taken. Subsequently the enemy twice counter attacked in strong force, on the second occasion outnumbering Lieutenant Borella's platoon by ten to one, but his cool determination inspired his men to resist heroically, and the enemy were repulsed, with very heavy losses. Commonwealth Gazette No. 23, 12 February 1919

Albert Borella was awarded the Victoria Cross by King George V at Sandringham Palace on 16 September 1918.

At age 36, Borella is one of the oldest recipients of the Victoria Cross, and the only Northern Territory soldier to receive this distinguished accolade.

Borella returned to Australia and was discharged on 23 February 1919. He received a soldier settlement block at Hensleigh Park, near Hamilton in the Western District of Victoria where he returned to his former life as a farmer.

Borella married Elsie Love in 1928 and they had four sons. In 1939 he officially changed his name to Chalmers-Borella and it was under this name at the outbreak of World War II he was appointed to the 12th Australian Garrison Battalion as a lieutenant. He served into his mid-sixties with the Prisoner of War Group, Rushworth; and then with the 51st Garrison Company being promoted to temporary Captain.

After demobilisation, Borella became an officer of the Commonwealth Department of Supply and Shipping as an Inspector of Dangerous Cargoes. He retired in 1956, and went to live in North Albury, NSW. Albert Borella died on 7 February 1968 aged 86, and is buried at the Presbyterian Cemetery in Albury, New South Wales.

The reality of Borella's Territory life was that it did not bring him much luck. Borella came here with hopes of pioneering agriculture on the Daly River. Despite herculean efforts and using all his life savings up to that point, he ended up destitute, summonsed, nearly thrown in jail and having to go into personal debt to enlist.

Despite Borella's many achievements and eventful life, his extraordinary physical courage and capacity, he is recalled by those who knew him as a quietly-spoken, modest man.

In acknowledgement of Albert Borella's time in the Territory, we are proud to claim him as one of our own.

Perhaps some stories do not belong to a single place or time, but in this year of the Centenary of the Anzacs, it is fitting that we acknowledge Albert Borella as a true Territorian.



Albert Borella VC at the Melbourne Anzac Day Parade 1966. Borella Collection.



In 1915, Albert Borella journeyed through 1,000 kilometres of the Northern Territory Outback from Tennant Creek to Darwin to enlist in World War I.

He fought at Gallipoli and the Western Front; was wounded, commissioned on the battlefield, and was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest honour for valour in combat.

Albert Borella was one of the many who went to fight for their nation.

From 20 February to 3 March 2015, 100 years later, The Borella Ride will symbolically retrace Albert Borella's footsteps along the Stuart Highway in commemoration of the Anzac Centenary.

By commemorating Albert Borella through The Borella Ride, we can reflect on the broader story of Northern Territory development and the significant contribution made by Australians to the First World War.

The Borella Ride is the Northern Territory Government's flagship Anzac Centenary activity, supported by the Australian Government.

Be an extra for The Borella Ride!

We are looking for volunteers to be part of the final ceremony of The Borella Ride at Stokes Hill Wharf, Darwin on Tuesday, 3 March 2015.

Volunteers of all ages are welcome to be part of this once in a lifetime activity to mark 100 years since World War I.

Extras will be dressed in 1915 costumes and will help to provide a backdrop to Borella's arrival onto the wharf.

Volunteers will need to be available on the following days

Costume fitting – Sunday, 15 February 2015 – From 2pm

Dress rehearsal – Sunday, 1 March 2015 – 2pm

Performance – Tuesday, 3 March 2015 – 3.30pm to 7pm

To find out more and to register go to

www.theborellaride.com.au

Retracing Albert Borella's journey...

Tennant Creek
20 February

Arrival
21 February, 2:30pm - 3:00pm*
Departure
22 February, 7:15am - 7:30am*

Banka Banka
21 February

Community BBQ
19 February, 2015
5:30pm - 7:00pm
Nyinkka Nyunyu Cultural Centre

Official Departure Ceremony
20 February, 2015
8:30am - 10:00am
Nyinkka Nyunyu Cultural Centre

Renner Springs
22 February

Arrival
22 February, 2:30pm - 3:00pm*
Departure
23 February, 7:15am - 7:30am*

Community Reception and BBQ
23 February, 2015
5:00pm - 7:00pm
Elliott Sport & Recreation Centre

Elliott
23 February

Dupmarra
24 February

Arrival
24 February, 2:30pm - 3:00pm*
Departure
25 February, 7:15am - 7:30am*

Daly Waters
25 February

Arrival
25 February, 2:30pm - 3:00pm*
Departure
26 February, 7:15am - 7:30am*

Arrival
26 February, 2:30pm - 3:00pm*
Departure
27 February, 7:15am - 7:30am*

Larrimah
26 February

Community Reception and BBQ
28 February, 2015
5:00pm - 7:00pm
Katherine Showgrounds

Travelling Display - Open for Schools
02 March, 2015
8:30am - 11:30am
Katherine Showgrounds

Mataranka
27 February

Community Reception and BBQ
27 February, 2015
5:00pm - 7:00pm
Mataranka Town Hall

Katherine
28 February & 2 March

Community Reception and BBQ
02 March, 2015
5:00pm - 7:00pm
Pine Creek Town Hall

Pine Creek
2 March

Adelaide River
3 March

Arrival and Departure
03 March, 2015
12:30pm - 1:30pm
Stuart Hwy near
Adelaide River Railway Museum

Darwin
3 March

Borella's War - NT Library Exhibition
02 February - 03 May 2015
10:00am - 4:00pm
Northern Territory Library

Official Arrival Ceremony
03 March, 2015
5:30pm - 7:30pm
Stokes Hill Wharf



* Arrival and departure times may be subject to change due to weather conditions and unforeseeable circumstances.