Captain Andrew Gillison, 14th Battalion, AIF
DOW 22 August 1915

Story delivered 29 July 2014

Today we remember and pay tribute to Captain Andrew Gillison, Chaplain to the Forces, 4th Class, Australian Imperial Force.

Andrew Gillison was born in Baldernock, Scotland, on 7 June 1868, and attended Watson's College in Edinburgh. In 1895 he married Isabel Napier, and they went on to have three sons and a daughter. He became an ordained Presbyterian minister and in 1905 the family moved to Australia. Gillison became the minister of St Paul's Church in Brisbane and, after many years' service there, moved to the East St Kilda Presbyterian Church in Melbourne.

Gillison had previous military experience in the Queen's Ediburgh Rifle Volunteer Corps in Scotland, and served as chaplain in the Australian Citizens' Militia Force for eight years after arriving in Australia. He was a keen marksman and a member of the Melbourne Rifle Club, where he was known as a "crack shot".

Following the outbreak of the First World War Gillison applied for a commission to serve as chaplain in the Australian Imperial Force, and was posted to the 14th Battalion.

Captain Gillison was a larger-than-life character, well known in both his battalion and its brigade. He was famed for his prowess as a marksman, and liked to help the men with their shooting. The keen interest he took in individuals no matter their religion or denomination – "not in an off-hand sort of way", as one man described it, but "a real and fatherly sort of way" – made him popular among the men. He "could sing a comic song, intone a hymn, make an after-dinner speech, or recite Shakespeare", and he won boxing and shooting tournaments on board the troopship.

At Gallipoli the men spoke "with the heartiest admiration" of Gillison's "fearlessness under fire, his tireless care for the wounded and the dead, his great gallantry and self-sacrifice, and his desire to lend a hand for the common interest".

On 22 August 1915 Gillison was in a communication trench with stretcher-bearer and Methodist minister Corporal Robert Pittendrigh. The two heard a wounded man out in no man's land, and could see him waving. Although they had been warned of snipers and knew a Turkish machine-gun

was sometimes trained on that part of the trench, they tried to crawl out to help. Both men were soon hit, and were eventually brought back to an Australian casualty clearing station. Pittendrigh was sent away for treatment, eventually dying of his wounds.

Gillison's doctor declared his condition serious but not hopeless. Gillison expressed relief that he would be okay, but soon lapsed into unconsciousness and died three hours later. His body was placed on a stretcher underneath a Union Jack, and he was buried by moonlight beside the Aegean Sea. The senior chaplain of the 2nd Division wrote to Mrs Gillison of his admiration for her husband, adding: "his brigade, as well as his battalion, mourn his loss".

In Australia he was remembered as "ever a true Christian, a true man, a true soldier and a true sportsman". Captain Andrew Gillison was 47 years old.

His name is listed on the Roll of Honour on my right, along with more than 60,000 others from the First World War, and his photograph is displayed beside the Pool of Reflection.

This is but one of the many stories of courage and sacrifice told here at the Australian War Memorial. We now remember the Reverend Andrew Gillison, and all of those Australians who have given their lives in the service of our nation.

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