Waldron Nelson

Upon the outbreak of World War One in 1914, German possessions and the German Fleet in the Pacific became of significant strategic importance. The German squadron was a menace to Australian shipping and seaboard towns.

— Embarkation of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force in Sydney.

Perhaps this was the trigger for Jamberoo local John Andrew Waldron Nelson to join up on 12 August 1914. He and 1500 others embarked on the troop ship Berrima on the 19th August 1914.This was the first force ever to leave Australia with its own ships, under the command of Australian officers.

SERGT. WALDRON NELSON.

Mr. Waldron Nelson, eldest son of Mr. Nelson of Jamberoo, and now Sergt. Nelson, was among the first to offer for service in the First Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force; he belongs to 2nd section of A Company, which sailed in the Berrima. In company with some 16 other members selected from the force, he returned to Sydney some eight weeks ago in charge of 81 German prisoners, amongst whom was the Deputy-Governor of New Britain. The guard left Sydney again in the Matunga, arriving at Raboul about the 27th October. He has written stating that he has been promoted to the Treasury, i e The First British Administration Treasury at Raboul, the capital of the whole of the Bismark Archipelago. His hours from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., although not strictly "union," are shorter than when on regular military duty, and easier, especially than sentry duty, in such a warm climate, when sometimes at night, like others, he had to stand with the point of bayonet just under his chin so that the least "nod" would cause the point of the bayonet to create that alertness, which secures immunity from the death sentence, the punishment for falling asleep on duty.

We congratulate Mr. Nelson on having a son serving with honour in his country's cause, and on his rapid promotion in the service.
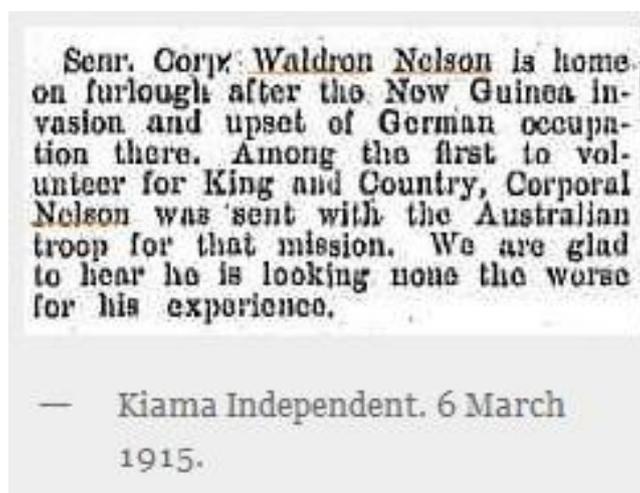
Kiama Independent. 2 December 1914.

— The Berrima.

The years leading to the war had seen Nelson employed in the Department of Electrical Engineers for Railways and Tramways, Sydney. At the outbreak of war, he was in business with his father, John.

Promoted to Corporal, in October 1914 Nelson returned to Sydney with 16 other members from the force, acting as an escort for 31 German prisoners, including the Deputy Governor of New Britain.

Senr. Corp. Waldron Nelson is home on furlough after the New Guinea invasion and upset of German occupation there. Among the first to volunteer for King and Country, Corporal Nelson was sent with the Australian troop for that mission. We are glad to hear he is looking none the worse for his experience.

— Kiama Independent. 6 March 1915.

Once back at Rabaul, Nelson was promoted to Seargent and secured a position with the First British Administration Treasury. Soon after he contracted malaria, with the rest of his military career being hampered by ill health.

Whilst still a soldier in the A.I.F., Nelson, then aged 29, married 20 year old Josephine Wyborn in September 1919, in Sussex.

Waldron Nelson had survived the Great War, but his son was not so lucky during the hostilities of 1939 – 1945. Lieut. Rupert Nelson was killed in action in Borneo, aged 18.

Nelson returned to Rabaul not long after, but not before there was a farewell for him and others at the Jamberoo School of Arts, where he was presented with a sheep skin vest from the local Red Cross Society.