

POST WAR History - Research by Eddie Jenz, Grandson

After Edward Abbott arrived back in Australia he returned home to Gympie. He approached the local repatriation committee some time after the war ended and requested a loan to start a café business in Gympie. The application indicated he would create a partnership with his mother and sister and they would run the business. This application was refused. He became angry and confused by the lack of understanding of the committee but their reasons were that he could not competently run a business with one arm. He then asked the committee for advice on what he could do to earn a living and they suggested he enter a trainee-ship as a forester. Edward Abbott did the training course and passed all the required tests and examinations but when he attempted to obtain work in the trade he had just trained for he was refused because a man with one arm could not fulfil the requirements of the job.

Edward Abbott shortly after this married Catharine Ryan and the couple moved to Brisbane where there was more opportunities for employment.

I haven't traced my grandfather's life in Brisbane but two articles I found in local Brisbane papers give some indication of his troubled life after moving there.

There is no doubt he was no angel because he had already had dealings with the law in early 1914 before he joined the Army in January 1915 for the first time, but his injury and loss of his right arm was a decided influence in his continuing difficulties to earn a living and feed and house his growing family.

The local Repatriation Committees made some decisions which seemed to have no real sense since in this case they were ignoring the obvious ability of the man despite his incapacity due to what was the result of a war injury. He may have been a bit of a hothead and unable to accept the validity and position of authority figures and he certainly disobeyed orders as well but after his injury the Repatriation Committees with whom he had dealings seemed to have no real empathy for his situation. They were trying hard to resettle able-bodied men (and women) into the workforce and seriously disabled veterans were left to fend for themselves a great deal.

I really loved the stories that my mother used to tell me about our grandfather when he used to row a boat out into Moreton and fish even though he only had one arm. He rigged up some kind of jury-rigged attachment to the oars and rowed well in a straight line or in a turn when necessary. His ingenuity should have been enough for the Repatriation Committees and the Repatriation Department to realise he was a capable man despite his obvious disability.

I believe that the disabled, especially those with a profound disability such as a missing arm or leg, were badly served by the Repatriation Committees, the Repatriation Department and the governments of the day. These men put their lives on the line (whether like me you think that was stupid or not) and their governments and those charged with their rehabilitation simply swept them aside as being too difficult a problem.