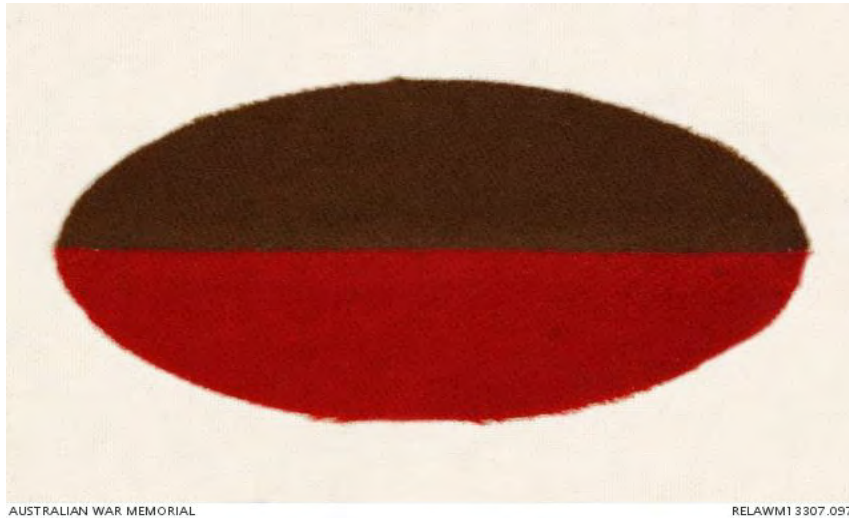


## THE RUSSIAN 39<sup>TH</sup> MEN



**(Russian Imperial flag in WW1)**

**Of the approximately 300000 personnel who served in the Australian Imperial Force in World War 1 the majority of the non-Australian born were from the United Kingdom. The 2<sup>nd</sup> largest group of non-Australians were from Russia. This was Imperial Russia, prior to the 1917 Revolution, and includes places such as Latvia and Finland**

**These are the men from Russia who enlisted in the AIF and served in the 39<sup>th</sup> Battalion, or men who the Australian authorities regarded as Russian.**

## **Abolin. Pte 1021 Peter**

Born 22/02/1892, Riga, Latvia. Religion Lutheran. Father John Abolin, lived at Stukmani, Latvia

Family Wife Amelia Selina Rayner (nee Hancock), married 1949, Sydney

Arrived at Australia from Ellis Island, New York City, USA on 03/06/1915 on SS Amazon. Disembarked at Melbourne

Residence before enlistment Melbourne. Occupation Seaman/labourer, after the WWI worked at Sydney waterfront

### **Service**

Enlisted 21/03/1916 at Melbourne. Rank Private

Served Western Front, 1916-1919. RTA 27/05/1919. Discharged 04/09/1919. Naturalisation 1940

Residence after the war Melbourne, Sydney. Died 1980, Randwick, Sydney

## **Forster. Pte 261 Sergius. (Russian spelling Сергей Форстер)**



(Pentridge Prison Prisoner Register archive photo, 1926)

Born 21.03.1893, New York, USA to Russian parents Nicholas and Ekaterina (nee Rodionova) Forster. Religion Russian Orthodox

Left USA at the age of 18 months, lived in Russia for 7 years, then in Middlesex, England. Arrived at Australia in 1914. Residence before enlistment Hillside, Clunes, Victoria. Occupation 1916 clerk, 1931 printer

### **Service 1 Overseas**

Enlisted 01/03/1916 at Melbourne. Ranks Private, A/Corporal, T/2/Corporal, E.R.2/Corporal

Served Western Front, 1916-1917, England, 1918-1919. RTA 25/09/1919. Discharged 05/01/1920

### **Service 2 (Home service)**

Rank Private. Registered number 83469. Enlisted 27/09/1920 at Melbourne. Served in Supply and transport unit. Discharged 05/08/1921. Served as naturalised British subject; naturalisation 1931

Residence after the war Melbourne. Died 14/06/1935, Melbourne

## **Haritonoff. Pte 1024 Peter (Russian spelling Петр Харитонов)**

Born 1894, St Petersburg, Russia. Religion Russian Orthodox

Father Pavel Haritonoff. Arrived at Australia before 1914. Residence Melbourne.

Occupation 1916 electrical engineer; 1917 electrical mechanic

### **Service**

Enlisted 21/03/1916 at Melbourne. Rank Signaller, previously served as a Reservist in Imperial Russian Army. Joined AIF due to inability to return to Russia.

Served Western Front, 1916-1917, also served in 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF. RTA 27/07/1917. Discharged 17/12/1917 Medically Unfit (illness). Naturalisation Served as Russian subject

Residence after the war Melbourne, Port Pirie, SA, Ballarat, Vic; probably returned to Russia. No further Australian records found.

It is indeed unfortunate that some Russian AIF men in other units returned to Russia after the Great War to serve in the new Russian military after the 1917 Revolution only to be interred by the Bolsheviks, tortured by the NKVD (secret police) and sentenced to prison in the gulags. Most did not survive.

## **Karllstrom. Pte 923 Gunnar**



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL HO5586  
Pte G Karllstrom - DOW 11th Jan 1917

Born 13/08/1890 Helsingfors (Helsinki), Finland. Ethnic origin Finnish. Religion Church of England  
NOK - Mother Henrica Karlstrom. Family Wife Margaret (nee Hanratty), son Gunnar Roy Patrick  
Karlstrom.

Arrived at Australia from Sweden on 01/12/1910 on SS Glenlog. Disembarked at Melbourne

Residence before enlistment Korumburra, Melbourne, Freestone Creek, Ballarat, Vic. Occupation  
Labourer. Naturalisation as British subject 1914

### **Service**

Enlisted 07/02/ 1916 at Melbourne.

Served Western Front, 1916-1917. Wounded Nov 1917. DOW 11/01/1917

Cemetery 297 Trois-Arbres Cemetery Steenwerck, France

## **Olin. Pte 551 Axel Alexander**

Alias Alex Olin. Born 1879. Abo (Turku), Finland. Ethnic origin Finnish. Religion Church of England.  
Father Gustav Olin, Mother Anna Olin, Nephew Pte 596 Usko Leonard Salonen, enlisted together

Arrived at Australia pre-1914. Residence before enlistment Dunedin, NZ; Naturalisation 1908 in New  
Zealand. Residence 1916 Murrumbena, Vic. Occupation Seaman.

### **Service**

Enlisted 18/03/1916 at Murrumbena, Victoria. Ranks Private, Corporal, Sergeant

Served Western Front, 1916-1918. Awards Military Medal (London Gazette 04/02/1918).

KIA 21/02/1918. Cemetery 339 Berks Cemetery Extension (Rosenberg Plateau Plots) Ploegsteert,  
Belgium

**Ouchirenko. Pte 6327 John (Russian spelling Иван Григорьевич Овчаренко)**

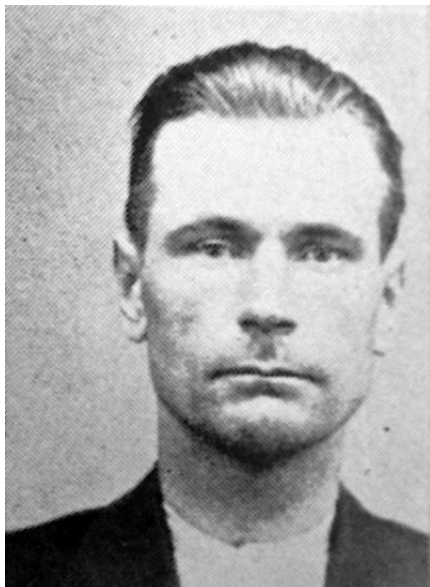


Photo – Pentridge Prison Staff photo. Alias Oucharenko, Oucherenko

Born 26/08/1895 Odessa, Ukraine. Ethnic origin Ukrainian. Religion Roman Catholic.

Father Gregory Oucharenko, Mother Svetlana. Family Wife Clara Oucharenko (nee Lane), married in 1917 in England, Ruby born 1919, (wife and child remained in England).

Arrived in Australia from USA January 1915 on SS Boorel, disembarked Melbourne. Residence before enlistment Melbourne. Occupation 1916 engineer, mechanic, 1919 engineer, 1922 ship's engineer, 1939 engineer, barber

**Service 1 WW1**

Enlisted 01/05/1916 at Melbourne. Unit 5th Battalion, 39th Battalion. Rank Private

Served Western Front, 1917-1918. WIA 1917 (twice). RTA 20.11.1918. Discharged 04/02/1919 Medically Unfit.

**Service 2 (WWII)**

Service number Private V82552. Enlisted 05/01/1940 at Ballarat, Victoria

Units - 3rd Garrison Battalion, 9th Garrison Battalion, 1st Australian Brigade Ordnance Depot (Motor Transport spare parts)

Discharged 16/06/1944

Naturalisation 1920

Residence after the war Melbourne, Ballarat, Queenscliff, Moe, Victoria

Died 21.08.1971, Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, Victoria. Buried at Moe. Vic.

The sad story of engineer John Ouchirenko, which shows the strain that parties experienced sometimes, emerged from Ouchirenko's evidence at his court-martial, when charged with overstaying his leave in England.

"I was married to an English girl on 5 June 1917, with the consent of the girl's parents. Sometime later the girl's parents took exception to me and when I arrived on leave refused to let me know of my wife's whereabouts."

Previously, while in France, Ouchirenko had received letters apparently "signed by my wife stating that she did not wish to have any more to do with me. These letters affected me so much that I attempted to commit suicide but was stopped by my C.O. who especially gave me leave to come over and investigate matter. ... I was so distracted by the way I was treated by my wife's people ... that I really did not know what I was doing."

He suspected that his Russian origin was the reason for such treatment. He was in hospital when his wife Clara found him herself and it turned out that the letters had been forged by her family. The court, like Ouchirenko's commanding officer in France, was very lenient with him and Ouchirenko just forfeited a fortnight's pay. The story did not have a happy ending, however. Clara had a child but did not return with him to Australia, and later cancelled a free passage to Australia that Ouchirenko had organised through the military authorities.

Luckily for John, he subsequently married an Australian girl, with whom he had a family; wife Doris Ouchirenko (née Robertson), married in 1927 in Australia; sons Ivan, David (1931-1958), Alexander (b. 1934), daughters Stepanita, Ann.

## **Pohlsen. Pte 2877 Gustaf Adolf**

Born 1874, Jakobstad, Finland. Ethnic origin Finnish. Religion Presbyterian.

Arrived at Australia c1889. Residence before enlistment 1896 Chiltern, Vic., 1898 sailed from Victoria to WA, 1906 Kalgoorlie, Kurramia via Kalgoorlie, WA

Occupation Baker

### **Service**

Enlisted 17/10/1916 at Kalgoorlie, WA. Unit 7th Battalion and 39th Battalion

Served Western Front, 1917

KIA 20/09/1917. Memorial The Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial Belgium

Naturalisation Served as naturalised British subject.

## **Preshner. Pte 2893 Morris**

Born 5.09.1893. Warsaw, Poland. Ethnic origin Jewish. Religion Jewish

Father Samuel Preshner. Family Wife Bertha Preshner (nee Luscombe), married 1924, stepson Jack Eric Slack (1913-1926)

Residence before arrival at Australia Left Poland for London with parents when he was 3 years old, lived in London for 17 years

Arrived Australia from London UK 08/1913 on SS Hawkes Bay. Disembarked at Melbourne

Residence before enlistment Melbourne. Occupation 1916 porter, commercial traveller, 1926 draper, 1929 salesman

### **Service**

Enlisted 20/09/1916 at Melbourne. Units 37th Battalion, 39th Battalion

Served Western Front, 1917-1919. WIA 1918. RTA 27/05/1919. Discharged 28/08/1919 Medically Unfit. Served as Russian subject, applied for Australian naturalisation 1929

Residence after the war Sydney, Melbourne. Died 01/07/1955, Melbourne

## **Sacks. Pte 3376 Bennett Solomon**

Alias Bennett Soloman Sacks

Born 09/03/1883 Waigove, Russia. Ethnic origin Jewish. Religion Jewish. Became a widower in 1917.

Residence before arrival at Australia Family in South Africa. Residence before enlistment Melbourne

Occupation 1917 ostrich feather merchant.

### **Service**

Enlisted 22/08/1917 at Melbourne. Units 39th Battalion and 46th Battalion

Served Western Front 1918-1919.

RTA 01/07/1919. Discharged 12.09.1919. Served as naturalised British subject

Residence after the war Melbourne.

## **Salonen. L/Cpl 596 Usko Leonard**



Alias Oscar

Born 1887. Abo (Turku), Finland. Ethnic origin Finnish. Religion Church of England. Father Gustav Salonen. Mother Eda Salonen. Contacts Uncle Pte 551 Axel Alexander Olin, enlisted together.

Arrived Australia c1905. Residence before enlistment Murrumbidgee, Vic. Occupation Seaman

### **Service**

Enlisted 20/03/1916 at Melbourne

Served Western Front, 1916-1917

WIA 1917. KIA 08/06/1917

Cemetery 168 Messines Ridge British Cemetery, Belgium

Served as Russian subject

## **Smelga. Pte 3375 John**

Alias Served as John Smilga

Born 12/07/1892 Riga, Latvia. Ethnic origin Latvian. Religion Church of England. Father John Smilga

Family Wife Florence Quinn Smilga (Smelga) (née Gateshead), married 1918; Daughter J. Smelga, b. 1925.

Arrived Australia 09/10/1917 on SS Ceramic. Disembarked at Melbourne. Residence before enlistment Port Adelaide, SA, Melbourne. Occupation Seaman, 1926 waterside worker

### **Service**

Enlisted 31/10/1917 St Kilda, Victoria

Served India and England, 1918. RTA 19/10/1918. Discharged 21.01.1919



Served as Russian subject, naturalisation was not found, but he appears in Australian electoral rolls, 1925-1954 (as John Smelga)

Residence after the war Melbourne. Died 24/10/1969, Melbourne

## **Williams. Pte 28647 John**

Born 1871 Pärnu, Estonia. Ethnic origin Estonian. Religion – not listed.

Residence before arrival at Australia from 11 years of age lived in other countries

Arrived Australia c1910. Residence before enlistment Portland, Victoria

Occupation Seaman, labourer

### **Service (Depot)**

Enlisted 13/05/1916 at Hamilton, Vic.

Discharged 29/08/1916 on conviction by civil power (Victoria Police) of manslaughter. Served 15 years in prison.

Naturalisation Served as Russian subject. Residence after the war by 1950 NSW.

Records are marked by a 39<sup>th</sup> Bn officer that Williams "Is a very bad man."

## **Yurak. Pte 2668 Oscar**

Alias Yurack, Jurak

Born 12/11/1885 at Salismunde, via Riga, Latvia. Ethnic origin Latvian. Religion Lutheran.

Father John Yurak.

Residence before enlistment Sydney. Occupation Labourer

### **Service**

Enlisted 20/07/1916 at Sydney. Units 8th Battalion, 39th Battalion and briefly AIF Military Police 1916.

Served Western Front 1917

RTA 27/09/1917. Discharged 10/12/1917, services no longer required

Served as Russian subject. Residence after the war Melbourne. Yurak is believed to have entered USA at Ellis Is, New York late 1920s. Later lived in Chicago USA.

Oscar Yurak made several written requests to the AIF to be transferred to the Imperial Russian Army once the 39<sup>th</sup> arrived in France. These requests were denied.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P08637.001

Oscar Yurak in AIF Military Police section - middle row far right.

#### Research Sources

##### ***The Thirty-Ninth - The History of the 39th Battalion Australian Imperial Force***

By Lt Col A.T. Paterson; Commanding Officer (3rd edition)

Australian War Memorial – [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au)

National Archives Australia – [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au)

***Russian Anzacs in Australian History*** by Elena Govor (Adjunct Research Fellow, College of Arts & Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia)