

## EPILOGUE: A TRAGEDY ON THE HOME FRONT

An extract from *Welcoming the Wounded ANZACS* by Terry Keenan, 2014

When the *SS Suevic* docked at the Railway Pier on 19 November 1915 Private Albert Edward Budd, a Port Melbourne resident, was among the wounded troops who disembarked. He was a mere 200 metres from the home of his foster sister Annie Samson and her husband George where he had lived as a boarder before the war. Most of the men on board had been convalescing in hospitals in England and *were able to walk although two were without legs while about the same number had each lost an arm*. They received a typically warm welcome from the ladies of the Port Melbourne Women's Welcoming Committee (WWC) who *attended with baskets of flowers and tossed them into the cars as they set off for the city*.<sup>1</sup>

It seems highly likely that Annie was one of the welcomers as she was one of a group of women, members of the Australian Women's Association (AWA), who became foundation members of the WWC<sup>2</sup>. Annie was born on 21 June 1887 to Thomas and Elizabeth Anderson, long time Port Melbourne residents. She had two older brothers and a younger sister. Following the death of her parents she lived with two of her siblings, William and Bessie at 147 Farrell Street. Budd, who was called 'Joe', also lived there. He had been taken in as a boy and fostered by the Anderson's<sup>3</sup>, an arrangement that followed from a promise made by Thomas Anderson to Budd's father that he would take care of young Albert if the need arose<sup>4</sup>.

Thomas Anderson worked on the wharves so it is not surprising that the household held strong working class values. Annie was imbued with these values and she developed a keen social conscience as she matured. While still a young adult she joined the Port Melbourne branch of the Political Labour Council, the forerunner of the Australian Labor Party. She was an energetic and dedicated worker for the branch eventually rising to the position of secretary. In that capacity she represented the branch at several conferences and was elected secretary of the Labour Women's Convention held in 1915<sup>5</sup>. A dedicated worker and a natural organiser Annie took a leading role in organising several large gatherings covering a range of social issues dear to the political labour movement at the time including in particular the anti-conscription movement, a very divisive issue across the country<sup>6</sup>. She also had responsibility for distributing funds to workers who were out of work on account a strike on the waterfront in 1917<sup>7</sup>.

Her activities in the labour movement were not her only commitment to the welfare of her fellow man or woman. She was an active member of the AWA and the WWC. In addition she also a member of the Port Melbourne branch of the Red Cross, a member of the ladies committee of the Port Melbourne Football Club and, as further evidence of the breadth of her social conscience, a donor to the Belgian Children's Christmas appeal in 1916, a popular charity at the time<sup>8</sup>. Clearly Annie threw herself enthusiastically into her many causes so it is no surprise to learn that she was awarded a gold medal in 1916 for selling the most tickets to a carnival in support of the work of the WWC. In addition she donated money to the WWC on more than one occasion<sup>9</sup>.

Annie married Stephen George Samson in the Holy Trinity Church in Port Melbourne on 30 April 1912 and they began their married life in a house at 127 Princes Street. Samson, widely known as George, was born in Sandhurst on 21 October 1888. After the family moved to Melbourne and took up residence in Ross Street Samson and his father obtained jobs as engine drivers with the Victorian Railways. George could play a more than useful game of football so it was no surprise that he made his way into the Port Melbourne football team in 1907. He quickly established himself as the club's best defender and in this role he gave the club outstanding service. He was the club captain in 1914.



*George and Annie Samson taken between 22 January and 19 February 1917.*

(Don Davis, a son of George's sister Mary)

Budd worked on the waterfront as a stevedore's labourer. He was 36 years old when he enlisted in the Australian Infantry Force (AIF) on 19 August 1914. Although his mother was alive and living in England at the time, he nominated a man called Henry Knight of Barlow Street Port Melbourne as his next of kin. Budd was attached to the 5th Battalion and was soon on his way to Egypt. He landed at Gallipoli on the first morning and was wounded in the left arm by shrapnel later that day. He was transported to hospital in Alexandria on 30 April where he was operated on to remove the shrapnel and was then transferred to England arriving at Plymouth on 7 May 1915. He recuperated at the Australian Military Hospital at Harefield Park in Middlesex before being transported back to Australia. In view of the medical assessment that he had suffered a loss of power in his left forearm and was rated as being only a 50% chance of being employable as a result of his injury he was discharged by the Army on 28 February 1916 and was allocated a war pension<sup>10</sup>.



*Private Albert Budd*  
(State Library of Victoria)

Samson enlisted in the AIF on 27 January 1917 and he was soon on his way to France<sup>11</sup>. He had an eventful start to the war as he on board the troopship Ballarat when it was torpedoed by a German U Boat at the entrance to the English Channel on 24 April.<sup>12</sup> He arrived in France on 25 May 1917 but three months later on 8 August he was transferred to a hospital in Belgium suffering from an ulcer

on his right cornea which was the result of a domestic accident that occurred before he joined the Army.<sup>13</sup>

In Samson's absence Annie continued to work at a frenetic pace which no doubt helped fill the void in her life caused by the absence of her husband. Upon his return from convalescence in England Budd lived with Annie and George at their house at 127 Princes Street. Due to his war wound he was either unable to work, or could not find work suitable with his injury. He decided to look for work in country Victoria and moved to Ouyen in June 1917, returning to Princes Street in August.<sup>14</sup> At this time the strike on the waterfront was in full swing and men who were out of work were calling at Annie's house looking for strike funds.<sup>15</sup> As Budd was back living in the house he must have been aware of this situation but he became convinced, so he later claimed, that Annie was entertaining these men while George was overseas. It appears that Budd had become openly infatuated with Annie who rejected his advances. Budd then began to drink heavily.<sup>16</sup>

Anxious about Budd's behaviour Annie told her father in law that Budd *wanted to take advantage of her*. He advised her to get Budd out of her house as soon as possible.<sup>17</sup> In September 1917 she ordered him out of her house and he returned to live in Farrell Street with Annie's siblings. Budd continued to pursue Annie so she approached the police after which a Constable Grant spoke to Budd and warned him to stay away from Annie's house. He took no notice and in October, following a further complaint from Annie, Grant searched the house and found two razors in an outhouse that Budd admitted he had put there.<sup>18</sup> He pestered her again in Bay Street on Thursday evening 18 October when she was out walking with her 12 year old sister-in-law Mary Samson. They came across Budd who exchanged words with Annie. According to evidence given by Mary to the Deputy Coroner Budd's parting words to Annie was *All right, Annie, look out for yourself*.<sup>19</sup>

The next night Budd, who had been drinking heavily during the day climbed through the back window of Annie's house and waited for her to return. She had been busy that evening completing arrangements for a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon due to be held in the Town Hall on the following Sunday to raise funds *to relieve the distress caused by the strike*.<sup>20</sup> Annie, unaware of Budd's presence in the house retired to her bed to read. At 10 o'clock the next morning her body was found on the floor of her bedroom clothed in her nightdress. Her throat had been cut so badly that her head was almost severed from her body. A deep cut on her left hand and a wound to her arm indicated that she had put up a struggle before succumbing to the attack.<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note given the claims by Budd that Annie had been entertaining other men in her home that one of the two men who discovered the body was William Henry Pretty who lived at 66 Evans Street. He had arrived at Annie's house to ask for financial assistance from her as he was out on strike.<sup>22</sup> Understandably, the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon was postponed.<sup>23</sup>

Earlier that morning Budd was found by Bessie fully clothed with his throat cut on the floor of his room at the Farrell Street house. From here he was taken to the Melbourne Hospital suffering from a loss of blood. Bessie was in the house when Budd returned home on the Friday night around half past ten and she later claimed that Budd was in an agitated state prior to retiring to his room.

When the police searched Annie's house they found a note in the dining room written by Budd addressed to the Port Melbourne police vaguely hinting that he intended to commit suicide. Two other notes were discovered at the Farrell Street house.

The first of the two notes read as follows:

*I went to the place at 8.30. She was out and I waited till she came in. I done the deed. I am sorry for all relations, her husband and friends. When you read this hurry round to 127 Princes street as fast as you can.*

In the second note Budd wrote:

*Dear Bill and Bessie. I cannot stand it any longer. I have done the deed. That is the end of everything. I went to Aggie's house at 8.30. That is the end of me and her. I told everyone the police would take me out of her house before I was finished. I am sorry I done the deed. I thought I would finish myself. Go around to 127 Princes street quick. Goodbye.. Joe Budd.*

When Budd was discovered by the police they found two blood stained razors in his room. While he was being attended to in hospital he was alleged to have pointed to his throat and said *Get this fixed up and it will soon be ready for the rope.*<sup>24</sup>

Annie Samson's funeral was held on Monday 22 October 1917. It was a very moving affair reflecting the esteem in which she was held by the local community. According to the report in the local newspaper 1,000 people gathered in Farrell Street in the vicinity of the family home. *In front of the hearse slowly walked 30 ladies of the Political Labour Council and 50 men belonging to the same body and a party of members of the Loco Drivers and Fireman's Association.* Local Members of Parliament and councillors from the Port Melbourne and South Melbourne councils were also present, along with representatives of the AWA and the ANA. Most local trades were represented with the Port Phillip Stevedore's the most prominent.

*Behind the hearse moved coaches carrying members of the bereaved's family and a long line of vehicles full of friends.* The cortege moved to Graham Street then to Williamstown Road, *over the Bend then across the river and through Williamstown North to the place of burial.* At the gravesite the cortege was joined by the presidents of the Port Melbourne Cricket and Football Clubs as well as a representative of the local Railway United Football Club. The service at the graveside was conducted by Rev. William McKie of the Holy Trinity Church.<sup>25</sup>

The Deputy Coroner conducted an Inquest into Annie's death on 14 November. Budd was present at the hearing. In the evidence offered by the police it was claimed that Budd had said, *I'll tell you all about it. I have been back from the country almost two months. I saw men going to Annie's house, and I could not stand it any longer. An engine driver is to blame for it all. I went to her house at half past eight yesterday evening and got in through the back window. Annie was out so I planted myself inside. She came home and went to her bedroom. I put my coat outside and sneaked up the passage to her bedroom door. I heard a clock strike. I think it was half past nine. I looked in the room. There was a light burning and Annie was in bed reading. I rushed in and round to the foot of the bed. Annie jumped up and squealed. I pulled her head down by the side of the bed near the bottom and cut her throat. She screamed and struggled on to the floor. I watched her for a good while to make sure that she was dead. I shook her and she did not move. I went out the front door and went home. I then wrote a note and saying that I had done the deed and put it in my drawer. I had a sleep and then got up and wrote some more on the note and put it back in the drawer. You will see her blood on the paper. It was then seven o'clock in the morning and I picked up a razor and cut my own throat. I wish I had finished it.* He was committed for trial by the Deputy Coroner on the charge of murdering Annie Samson.<sup>26</sup>

Budd's original trial was *adjourned until the December sittings of the Criminal Court in order that he could be subjected to an independent medical examination as to his mental condition.*<sup>27</sup> The trial eventually continued before the Chief Justice Sir John Madden on 13 December. Mr Woinarski K C representing the Crown, outlined the events surrounding the crime and indicated that Budd had objected to men going to her house while her husband was absent on active duty overseas. In particular he claimed that an engine driver named Alexander Campbell was a regular visitor. Counsel

for the defence, T C Brennan claimed that Samson had left Budd as guardian of his wife and that he had contemplated suicide in consequence of what he had heard about her.

Budd said in giving his evidence that he had spoken to Annie about a man (Campbell) and she retorted that he (Budd) would be shot. When he went to tell her why he was contemplating suicide she rushed at him and he killed her thinking that they should die together.

After retiring for half an hour the jury found Budd guilty of murder. On receiving the jury's verdict the Chief Justice said that in his opinion *the verdict was obviously right*. In addressing the defence offered by Budd's legal representative the Chief Justice said that *the earliest expressions made by the prisoner, show clearly that it was his intention to murder her; but later on, possibly after you had had time to get advice, you changed your attitude in respect to the reason why you killed this unhappy woman*. In sentencing Budd to death by hanging he advised Budd *not to expect any mitigation of that sentence*.<sup>28</sup> The judgement was not reported. However, the comments of the Chief Justice as reported in the press suggest that he paid little or no credence to the defence mounted on behalf of Budd by his defence Counsel.

An effort to secure a reprieve for Budd was made by the Returned Soldiers Association but it was rejected by the Cabinet.<sup>29</sup> He was eventually executed on 29 January 1918. It was later reported that fifty people had visited Budd at Pentridge to say goodbye on the Sunday before his execution. The gaol authorities stated that *never before had such a number called on such an errand*.<sup>30</sup>

At the hour fixed for the execution a number of returned soldiers who had assembled in front of the main entrance to the gaol stood at attention and saluted. The prison Chaplain said that Budd had made a full and unreserved confession of his sins and that he was quite resigned to his fate. He (Budd) said that if it had not been for the drink he would never have committed the crime.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, in 1916, in her role as secretary of the Labour Council, Annie had made arrangements for a Mrs Katz to give an address in the Town Hall entitled 'Drink and the Worker', the evils of alcohol being one of the prominent issues of the time.<sup>32</sup>

After being informed of Annie's death while recuperating in London Samson was sent home arriving at Port Melbourne on 3 March 1918. He was subsequently discharged from the Army as medically unfit for service on 9 April.<sup>33</sup> He immediately resumed his football career and was listed among Port Melbourne's best players on several occasions during the remainder of the season.

In 1919 he took up the then popular game of quoits as well as playing another ten games of football for his club. It appears that he intended to retire from football at the end of season 1919, but he must have been prevailed upon to don the boots one last time in 1920 as he played his one and only game for the club on 19 June that year.



Samson did not return to the house in Princes Street. Instead he moved back in with his parents at 97 Ross Street before moving again in 1921 to a house at 136 Ross Street. He lived at that address until he left Port Melbourne in 1927 and moved to 44 Hall Street in Moonee Ponds where he lived for the remainder of his life. He died in the Royal Melbourne Hospital from the effects of an ulcerated stomach on 4 January 1950. He did not remarry. His death notice described him as *the dearly loved husband of the late Annie Samson*.<sup>34</sup>

Annie Sansom's grave in the Williamstown Cemetery  
(Terry Keenan)

The demise of Annie Samson at the hands of a Gallipoli veteran was a tragedy. We know that the horrible consequences of war are not confined to the conflict itself. They can and do ripple through the societies of participating nations far removed from the battlefields. Whether Budd's actions can be linked to and explained by his wartime experience, extremely brief as it was, or whether they were simply the result of a weak, obsessed and uneducated drunken mind we will never know. What we do know is that the life of a hardworking, innocent and generous soul was cut cruelly short before it had the chance to reach full bloom. The consequences were borne not just by her husband and immediate family but by the wider Port Melbourne community as well.

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<sup>1</sup> *Argus*, 20 November 1915

<sup>2</sup> *Standard*, 11 April 1914 & 14 August 1915

<sup>3</sup> *Argus*, 22 October 1917

<sup>4</sup> *The Leader*, 27 October 1917. When I interviewed Mrs Betty Anderson, who is a daughter in law of Annie's brother William, she told me that Budd had been abandoned by his family, which calls into question the accuracy of the report in the *Leader*.

<sup>5</sup> This convention was held at the Melbourne Trades Hall in September 1915. It brought together women delegates from State Electoral Councils and various other organisations affiliated with the Political Labour Council. The discussions centred on questions affecting women and children in the Federal, State and municipal platforms of the Labour Party. Some of the recommendations arising from the convention were criticized by the staunchly conservative *Argus* newspaper. This inaugural convention was planned as a biennial event. See *Argus* 21, 24 & 25 September 1915.

<sup>6</sup> *Standard*, 18 March 1910, 6 March, 14 August & 2 October 1915, 7 & 14 October 1916 & 17 March 1917.

<sup>7</sup> *The Truth*, 17 November 1917

<sup>8</sup> *Standard*, 26 June 1916 & 17 February 1917. The fate of the Belgian people at the hands of the marauding German army was receiving significant coverage in the press at this time.

<sup>9</sup> *Standard*, 20 May, 4 November & 9 December 1916

<sup>10</sup> *National Archives of Australia*, online

<sup>11</sup> *Standard*, 27 January 1917

<sup>12</sup> *Argus*, 28 April 1917 and *Standard*, 3 May 1919

<sup>13</sup> *National Archives of Australia*, online

<sup>14</sup> *The Age*, 13 December 1917

<sup>15</sup> One of the men who discovered Annie's body was William Henry Pretty who lived at 66 Evans Street. He had arrived at Annie's house to get assistance from her, as he was out on strike. See *The Truth*, 17 November 1917.

<sup>16</sup> *The Truth*, 17 November & *The Age*, 13 & 14 December 1917

<sup>17</sup> *The Age*, 14 December 1917

<sup>18</sup> *The Age*, 13 December 1917

<sup>19</sup> *The Age*, 13 December & *The Truth*, 17 November 1917

<sup>20</sup> *Argus*, 22 October 1917

<sup>21</sup> *The Age*, 13 December 1917

<sup>22</sup> *The Truth*, 17 November 1917

<sup>23</sup> *Argus*, 22 October 1917

<sup>24</sup> *Argus*, 22 October 1917 & *Standard*, 16 February 1918

<sup>25</sup> *Standard*, 27 October 1917

<sup>26</sup> *Argus*, 15 November 1917

<sup>27</sup> *Argus*, 10 & 27 November 1917

<sup>28</sup> *The Age & Argus*, 14 December 1917

<sup>29</sup> *Argus*, 28 January 1918

<sup>30</sup> *Standard*, 2 February 1918

<sup>31</sup> *Argus*, 30 January & 2 February 1918

<sup>32</sup> *Standard*, 25 March 1916

<sup>33</sup> *National Archives of Australia*, online

<sup>34</sup> *The Sun News Pictorial*, 5 January 1950