



When Dudley Pilkington passed away on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2012, aged 92 years and 7 months, he was our oldest living Australian Centurion. His daughter Julianne wrote to me at the time to say

*Father's health had been failing over the past few months. Dudley recognised his family up to the last, his heart was strong but his body was worn out. Born on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1919, he lived a great life and was a wonderful loving father who treasured his involvement with the Centurion walkers. He was proud of his achievements and of being the oldest living member, up to the time of his death.*

Dudley was born on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1919 in Brighton, Tasmania, the 7<sup>th</sup> child in a family of 9 children, and spent his early life in Queenstown as a miner's son. Queenstown, its hills stripped of timber to fire the local copper smelters and permanently denuded by the sulphurous fumes which belched from the smelters, was a surreal nightmare in those days. Its river was badly polluted and it had the appearance of a deserted moonscape. By any measure, Queenstown was one of the wonders of the world, a profound reminder of humanity's capacity to destroy and pollute.

His father, a Boer War veteran, died in 1922 from complications caused by lung damage due to many years working underground in Queenstown. Dudley was only just over 3 years of age at that time. His mother had many offers of adoption but kept her family intact, something for which Dudley was always grateful. She continued on in Queenstown, rearing her large family while running a boarding house and preparing meals for others. Life was tough!

Dudley grew up in the sulphurous fumes – he reminisced that at times it was so dense that it could make you cough if you inhaled through the mouth. This was his first real playground until his family moved to Devonport in 1929 when he was about 11 years of age.

Dudley recalls that it was around 1926 when he was in the Queenstown State School as a 7 year old that he saw in a school dictation booklet that an Englishman had walked 100 miles within a day and this had been done wearing a suit, bowler hat and cane. This obviously sowed the seed of ultra-distance walking in his mind.

When he finished school in Devonport, he returned to Queenstown to work alongside his older brothers at the Mt Lyell copper mine. From 1937 onwards, he lived the rough and tumble life of a miner. He loved to hunt and fish, he was a fitness fanatic and proud of his physique and was a good amateur boxer. His daughter Julianne reminisced “*I am sure that those who ever met him felt his firm hand shake in his large strong hands*”.

With the outbreak of the war, he enlisted in the army and naturally joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Field Squadron Royal Australian Engineers. He worked in a variety of roles – as a miner, in water reticulation, building toilets in the trenches, excavating and as an army cook. He suffered fractures to multiple vertebrae in the back as a result of a blast during task-force demolitions in the Northern Territory. After 4 years of active duty, he was eventually demobilised and returned to civilian life. This injury led to spinal column deterioration and further problems

over a continuing period of time.

His mother had moved from Devonport in 1940 to live in Nicholson St, Yarraville (Melbourne), and the whole family, born and reared in Queenstown, moved and settled around her again as they were demobilised from the services.

Dudley married his sweetheart Rose in February 1944. Now living in Melbourne, he became a Waterside Worker, riding his bicycle around the various wharves in the Melbourne area. It was during their time in Yarraville that their two children Julianne and Christine were born.

In February 1956 he transferred back to Devonport in Tasmania so that Rose could be with her family. They bought an 11 acre property in Latrobe and he became an employee of the Australian National Line, loading and unloading the Princess of Tasmania ferry. He spent 19 years in their service before finally retiring.

All thoughts of walking were put from his mind for many years. It was not until he was 47 years of age (1966) that his thoughts turned once again to walking but as a means of rehabilitation – his walking was undertaken to help limber up the shoulders, arms, neck and back muscles for improved flexibility. The milkman saw him one morning and asked him if he was training for the fund-raising Retarded Childrens Welfare Association walk which was a distance of 30 miles. Dudley decided to give it a go and eventually came in as the winner in 5 of these 30 mile races over the next few years.

He was actively involved in various organisations and became associated with Graham Wright, a Public Relations officer from the Hobart Blind Institute. Dudley decided to organize a fund-raising 100 mile walk at the local Spreyton Park Racecourse on 15-16 December 1972. All funds raised were to be used for bulk buying Talking Book Library materials. He used the opportunity to complete the 100 mile distance himself in a time of **23:29:00**, becoming Australian Centurion Number 7. The racecourse lap was slightly less than one mile so the 100 mile distance was calculated to be just over 107 laps. Dudley walked 108 laps to be sure so actually walked slightly over 100 miles for his qualifier. It was not all easy going – at one stage he lost 15 minutes with cramps in one leg. As a final challenge, the grass had not been cut!

Now fully enthusiastic about the 100 mile walk, Dudley travelled to Adelaide the following year (1973) for the Adelaide Harriers Jubilee 100 mile walk. Unfortunately he could only complete some 60 miles before being forced to pull out. The hot weather (it reached 33°C) that day took its toll with only one person finishing out of the 11 starters. That finisher was Fred Redman, one of our four founders. Dudley remembers walking the last lap with the 62 year old Fred along with fellow co-founder Len Matthews who was at that stage a very old man but still so enthusiastic about walking. Other well known retirees that day included Chris Clegg, eventually Australian Centurion No 11, who completed around 80 miles before collapsing at the toilet block, unable to continue.

On 18-19 October 1975 Dudley participated in the 100 mile walk held at the George Knott track in Melbourne and completed his second centurion finish, in a time of **22:59:00** (some 30 mins faster than his 1972 time). However, he developed haemorrhoids for the latter 9 hours of the walk and took 4 days to recover.



*Dudley completes his second 100 mile walk at the Collingwood Harriers track in Melbourne in 1975*

From then on, Dudley was an enthusiastic member of our elite club, closely following all club activities and performances and regularly corresponding with me.

Dudley eventually became a fulltime carer for his wife Rose, continuing in this role for over 10 years until she eventually died in 2003 after 59 years of happily married life. He then moved to a retirement hostel in Devonport where he could be close to his large extended family.



*This photo, from the Devonport Times issue of November 4 2008, shows Dudley (left) and fellow resident Frank Nicol being interviewed about their wartime experiences on the anniversary of the end of World War 1*

He retained his interest in all matters centurion during his final years and he was an avid reader of our regular newsletters. An active resident in both mind and body, he managed to get out for regular walks for all but the last period of his life when his health finally deteriorated and his body said it was time to stop after a long life of hard work.

To his 2 daughters Julianne and Christine and to Dudley's large extended family, we extend our deepest sympathies on such a sad occasion. Dudley will long be remembered by us for his achievements on the track and for his ongoing contribution to our club as an active and enthusiastic member.

Tim Erickson  
3 March 2012