

Ballarat Heritage Services

Articles

William Charles Almeida ALMEIDA

Dorothy Wickham
© copyright

" A gun flamed in the bank! Clutching his side and gasping with pain, a bank teller courageously called a robber's bluff on 28 November 1924. "

Around three in the afternoon two men from Squizzy Taylor's gang had tried to rob the only teller in attendance at the Commercial Bank in Orlando Street, Hampton. William Charles Almeida, aged 22 told the detectives that two men pointed an automatic pistol at him and said "Put 'em up". As he tried to rush around to the back of a wooden partition to get his revolver he was fired upon. A bullet struck him in the stomach and he fell to the floor. The men went to the till and stole cash.

One, a solidly built man, wore a white dust overcoat and cap, while the other wore a dark suit. The man in the dust overcoat walked casually towards a grocer's shop opposite the bank. Almeida who was seriously wounded stumbled out of the bank, found the robber, and with the help of the public held him at gun point, and marched him back to the bank. When the police arrived Almeida was taken to hospital where the next day he died, but not before he indicated that the man in the dust overcoat was one of the perpetrators of the robbery. This was corroborated by the car driver who had been hired by the felonious pair to drop them at the bank.

Sir William Irvine the chief justice imposed a harsh sentence. The accused was given 15 years gaol and three whippings, each of 12 strokes with the cat-o-nine-tails. There were seven grounds of appeal and eventually the floggings were rescinded. The second robber was arrested a year later, tried and convicted of manslaughter, and sentenced to 15 years gaol also.

William Charles Frederick Almeida who was born in Ballarat on 19 January 1902 is remembered in many ways. The Almeida Pavilion on the shores of Lake Wendouree bears his name. On the north wall of Christ Church Cathedral there is a plaque commemorating his courageous actions. At the Ballarat Town Hall there is a similar plaque above the main staircase. A drinking fountain was erected on a reserve in Hampton opposite the Sandringham football ground. In 1925 Ballarat Grammar School, where Almeida was educated, named a rowing shell "Almeida" in his honour. To perpetuate the memory of Almeida the Associated Banks and Bank Officials Association opened a fund to establish a scholarship in his memory which has been perpetuated in one of the School's scholarships. One of the contributors, the Old Melburnians, wrote of the noble conduct of Almeida noting that Ballarat Grammar, 'in common with other public schools had many heroes in the Great War, and they by their deeds and deaths have made their names immortal'. Their letter continued 'Now in peace your Old Boy has shown that the lessons of devotion to duty, courage, and self-sacrifice inculcated in the public schools, are as potent as they were in the war, and we honour his memory and the school which produced him'.

What fitting tributes these memorials are to William Charles Frederick Almeida who was educated at Ballarat Grammar, engaged with the Ballarat Banking Company in 1920, worked with the Commercial Banking Company in 1924 and died in exceptional circumstances on 29 November 1924.