

2012 Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize

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LOXTON HIGH SCHOOL



WALTER STANLEY PEARCE

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Private Walter Stanley Pearce's experience in the Great War on the Western Front lasted only 24 hours, however in this time Walter demonstrated true ANZAC Spirit. The ANZAC spirit is the willingness to serve your country and involves possession of a desire to succeed. To always try your hardest, to look after your mates, to have a sense of humor, to fight for what you believe in and to keep battling, no matter how hard it is. These characteristics have given us what we have today, security, opportunity and citizenship. We are forever in debt to the men and women who served our country, for they gave their all to give us the freedom we enjoy today.

Pearce's upbringing was one of a typical country boy. Walter was born in Kooringa, South Australia (now known as South Burra) on 15th March, 1892, to Walter and Ann Pearce who were also born and raised in Kooringa. As a child Walter attended Burra Public School and later became a draper in Kooringa. Coming from the country Walter would have had some advantages over city folk, such as being able to adapt to the land better in battle compared to city folk due to his history of

living in harsher conditions. With this experience Private Pearce would have proved a valuable addition to Australian forces, clearly displaying the ANZAC spirit in the process.

I believe Walter showed true ANZAC qualities as in his final letter sent to his family, he mentions his departure from Australia to, 'take part in this great strife, which I feel is my duty' (see attached). Walter goes on to say he is willing to risk his life to defend and protect Australia and if death were on his cards, then so be it because he was doing what was right. The letter is currently in my Grandmother's possession and she has kindly photocopied it for me.

Walter enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on the 22nd of July 1915, the second year of World War I. With the AIF going through the disaster that was Gallipoli, Walter decided to enlist, feeling he was required to help. When Walter enlisted in the Army at Keswick, an inner city suburb in Adelaide South Australia, he stood at a small 5 feet 8 inches (172 centimetres), and weighed just 67 kilograms. Walter was the first of 5 children (followed by Arthur, Edward, Edwin and Ida) to enlist to in the AIF, he was also the only child who was killed in the Great War. Being the first child to enlist would have been very difficult and emotional for Walter, because he would have had no clue what the War involved and what to expect. Being of small stature, Walter exemplified the ANZAC Spirit, in that he was working against the odds and by all reports remained cheerful while doing so.

The Battle of Fromelles has been described as 'the worst 24 hours in Australia's entire history' by the Australian War Memorial. Walter's first and only action was the Battle of Fromelles. This battle was fought out over 24 hours, 19th-20th July, 1916. Fromelles was the A.I.F's first taste of battle on the Western Front. The main purpose for the battle was to create a diversion from the battle of Somme, taking place some 80 kilometres south. The intentions

were to thin out the enemy's numbers for the Battle of the Somme. The young and inexperienced 5th Division began their advance bravely and with determination at 1800 hours, with just two hours of sunlight remaining. In these two hours, the 5th Division made excellent ground, covering over 1000 metres of enemy territory. Words cannot describe the horrors Walter would have seen during his time on the battlefield. However, the ANZAC Spirit's renowned traits of camaraderie and persistence would have assisted Walter to deal with the terrible conditions. It is impossible to imagine what Walter was thinking at the time; however he was most likely grateful not to be charging for the enemy lines. Walter was part of the 8th Brigade fighting on the left flank at the Battle of Fromelles, which can be seen in Figure 2.

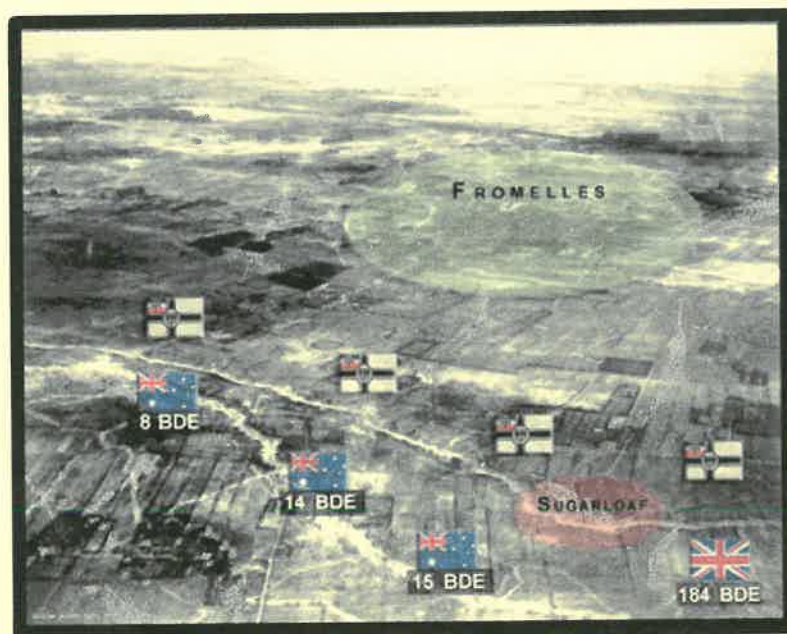


Figure 2: an aerial view with positions of the Battle of Fromelles.
(http://www.army.gov.au/fromelles/The_Battle_1916.asp)

Not long after this moment, the German Empire released two counter attacks, the first being at sunset on the 19th of July. This attack was driven off relatively quickly, but the second attack was devastating. At 0100 hours on the 20th of July, the German Empire directed an attack at both ends of the Australian positions, and by 0400 hours they had succeeded, they had wiped out almost all of the Australian numbers at the Battle of Fromelles. By 0800 hours all remaining Australian soldiers had been forced to retire, and leave the battle. Walter died whilst in action on the fields, on the 20th July, 1916.

His death occurred at approximately 0100 hours, the beginning of the German's fight back. There is no full report available of Walter's death; however we do know that he was killed in action. Throughout Walter's short time in World War I he was awarded with the Star Medal, British War Medal and the Victory Medal. In this short 14 hours of battle, 5,533 Australian lives were lost, along with 1,547 British lives whereas just over 1,000 German soldiers were lost. The 32nd Battalion, which Walter was involved in, began the Battle of Fromelles with 800 men, and after 16 hours of struggling they walked away with just 99 left. To be at the battle would have been horrendous, I can't put into words to horrors Walter would have seen during his short time. To see soldiers falling all around you would have made Walter extremely nervous, worried, emotional and on edge as he wouldn't have known when it

was his turn to die. By fighting on despite the horrific scenes he was witnessing, he showed true ANZAC qualities. Walter fought bravely and determinedly until the end of his only action in the Great War, clearly demonstrating what I believe to be the true meaning of the ANZAC Spirit.

Private Walter Stanley Pearce exemplified everything the ANZAC spirit means to me. His acts of bravery, camaraderie, hardship and determination are values that should not be taken for granted. The ANZAC Spirit is commemorated at emotional events such as Dawn Services, the AFL ANZAC Day Match, parades, every day at the Australian War Memorial, also at other War Memorials throughout Australia and in countless other ways. By attending many ANZAC Dawn Services I have witnessed firsthand the most special commemoration of ANZAC Spirit. I will never fully understand the things Walter had experienced, saw, heard or felt, but I can appreciate, respect and be thankful for his sacrifice. Before completing this assignment Dawn Services have always been an emotional experience for me. However, now that I have more understanding of the Great War along with the harrowing experiences of the Western Front and know the story of Walter, it will mean so much more to me. I believe it is very important to not only honour the Australian soldiers with recognized achievements, but to also honour all men and women who fought their hardest, many giving their lives. They showed true ANZAC Spirit.

Walter was one of the many soldiers like this and despite his minute stature and inexperience; he tried and fought for his country, clearly displaying true ANZAC Spirit. This has made us the nation we are today and the ANZAC Spirit never die. It is instilled throughout the generations and is the fire in the heart of every Australian and New Zealander. Without these heroes unveiling ANZAC Spirit, we wouldn't have the country we have today; we are forever in their debt.

I feel extremely proud to have been given the opportunity to research and relate to you the story of my Great, Great Uncle Private 267, Walter Stanley Pearce.

By Max Baker



North Adelaide, 14th November 1915.

My Dear Father, Mother Brothers and Sisters.

I am writing this little note the Sunday before my departure from Australia to take part in this great strife, which I feel is my duty.

I am leaving with great hopes that I shall be spared to come back again, but if it be my lot to fall as many others have done, I ask you not to take it too hard. Just feel that it has been God's Will that it was the death that was marked out for me in the history of life, and that all will be right in the end. I have not lived as good a life as I ought, but I pray that all my shortcomings will be forgiven, and that we shall all meet in Heaven. The good old song is ringing in my ears, "God be with you till we meet again"

Since enlisting I have realised more keenly than ever I did before in my life the value of our good Home, and the love of a Mother, Father Brothers and Sisters.

I am just writing this as a farewell, which in a way I hope that you will not have occasion to open. If you do. Good Bye, and may God Bless you all.

With fond love to all.

Stanley.

KILLED IN ACTION

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AUSTRALIAN



MILITARY FORCES.

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE

ATTESTATION PAPER OF PERSONS ENLISTED FOR SERVICE ABROAD

No. 267 Name PEARCE Walter Stanley GOT. H. Group Bn. 1st Div. A.I.F. joined on July 22 1915

Company

Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation

- 1. What is your Name? 1. Walter Stanley Pearce
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? 2. in the Parish of Floodinga near the Town of Floodinga in the County of South Australia
3. Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject? (N.B. - In the latter, papers to be shown.) 3. N.B.
4. What is your age? 4. 23 1/2 yrs
5. What is your trade or calling? 5. Draper
6. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice where, to whom, and for what period? 6. No
7. Are you married? 7. No
8. Who is your next of kin? (Address to be stated) 8. Mother, Mrs. Ann Pearce, Kingston Street, Floodinga, South Australia
9. Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power? 9. No
10. Have you ever been discharged from any part of His Majesty's Forces, with Ignominy, or as incorrigible and worthless, or on account of conviction of felony, or of a sentence of penal servitude, or have you been dismissed with disgrace from the Navy? 10. No
11. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in, His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy or Colonial Forces? If so, state which, and if not now serving, state cause of discharge 11. No
12. Have you stated the whole, if any, of your previous service? 12. yes
13. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for His Majesty's Service? If so, on what grounds? 13. No
14. (For married men, widowers with children, and soldiers who are the sole support of widowed mother) Do you understand that no Separation Allowance will be issued to you after embarkation during your term of service? 14. ~
15. Are you prepared to undergo inoculation against smallpox and enteric fever? 15. No

Walter Stanley Pearce do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and I am willing and hereby voluntarily agree to serve in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

And I further agree to allot not less than two-fifths of the pay payable to me from time to time during my service for the support of my wife and children

Date 16-7-15

Signature of Person Enlisted.

* This clause should be struck out in the case of unmarried men or widowers without children under 18 years of age. 1 Two-fifths must be allotted to the wife, and if there are children three-fifths must be allotted.

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