



The ANZAC spirit of Eric Harding Chinner



Eric Harding Chinner
15th Jan 1894 – 20th July 1916
32nd Battalion
Enlisted 30th September 1915
Source: www.awm.gov.au

*"To do my best from dawn of day till night;
To keep my heart fit for His holy sight,
And answer when He calls -
This is my task"*

Taken from Lieutenant Chinner's obituary

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Much has been written about how service men and women in World War 1 typified the Anzac Spirit. This report describes the journey of Eric Harding Chinner, a South Australian man who served on the Western Front during World War 1 who typified the ANZAC Spirit.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of Australians and New Zealanders rise at dawn on the 25th of April to remember. They remember the brutality of war, the death, and the troops being killed as if cows being slaughtered. World War 1 was one of the most tragic events in Australian history, but the one that defines Australian culture and pride even today. There was no substitute and no way to strip our ANZAC soldiers of their spirit. Everyday they lost friends, leaders and complete strangers to the enemy lines; this was enough to bring the strongest hearts and heads to emotional destruction. Without their spirit, they would have been crushed at Gallipoli within the first day, crushed at the Somme and crushed at Ypres, but the ANZAC spirit is stronger than bullets and fire and cannot be taken until the last breath leaves a soldier's body.

The courage that was shown and the loyalty to our country is what makes up much of the Australian pride today and the respect for World War 1 diggers is as strong as ever.

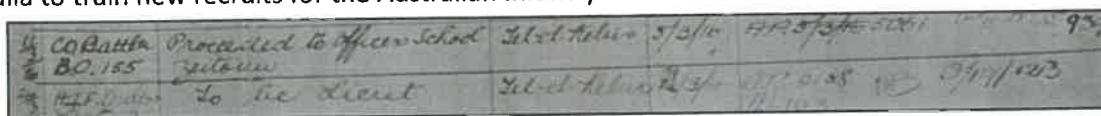
The early life of Lieutenant Eric Harding Chinner

Lieutenant Eric Harding Chinner was a South Australian born World War 1 soldier who died at Fromelles while serving on the Western Front in July 1916. I believe that he truly showed the ANZAC spirit during his time, before he was tragically killed in German lines.

Born 15 January 1894, in Peterborough, South Australia, he was only 21 when he boarded the *HMAT A2 Geelong* heading to battle. Before he enlisted in the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, Eric grew up in South Australia with his mother, father (the former Mayor of Peterborough) and brother. His brother, Wilfred also enlisted in the army but returned home in 1919 to rejoin his remaining family. Until he was 21, Eric worked as a Bank Clerk in Peterborough during the week and attended Baptist Church services on the weekend. At the time he enlisted, he was engaged to a Broken Hill woman, Gladys Dunn, who was also a Bank Clerk. When he embarked for the war, he left Gladys a locket containing a small photo of himself so that she could see him until he returned. Unfortunately this was the only way she would ever see him again. "A locket - no bigger than a thumbnail, containing his photo and initials - was to become the lasting memento of the man with whom she had planned to share her life, but whom she lost when he was killed in the bloody battle of Fromelles in 1916". (Locket reunites lost Digger Eric Chinner with Gladys Dunn – Pia Ackerman, *The Australian*), Gladys never married and kept the locket with her until she died in 1985 at the age of 92, when it was returned to the Chinner family.

Eric Harding Chinner's life and service on the Western Front

Prior to joining the Australian Infantry Forces in 1915, Eric trained at Fort Largs, SA, Duntroon Military College in Canberra, ACT, and Randwick NSW (Machine Gun School). He was a Lieutenant in the Senior Cadets and again later in the Citizen Forces. After being trained at Randwick in NSW, he returned to Mitcham in South Australia to train new recruits for the Australian Infantry Forces.



National Archives record showing Eric's training records

Source: www.naa.gov.au

After joining the AIF, Chinner was shipped out on the *HMAT A2 Geelong* on 18 November 1915, and taken to Suez in Egypt. On 5 March, he was taken to Officer's School and appointed a Lieutenant on 21 March 1916.

Between becoming a Lieutenant and reaching Fromelles, Eric went to Alexandria, in Egypt and Marseilles in France. He was then part of the Command in Terdeghen at a School of Instruction until 3 July 1916. He

rejoined his Battalion, the 32nd Battalion, on 9 July at Fromelles which, at the time, was considered the 'quiet' part of the line and new troops were taken there to become accustomed to the conditions on the front.

Even the short amount of time he spent in the trenches was a horrible experience. Watching old mates and new friends 'going over the top' as well as mud, clay and water filling his boots was horrific. Letters and reports back home from other members of his battalion say that the water filling the trenches was bad, but the sounds and sight of wounded and dying men was devastating. A machine gunner, Private Les Martin, from the same brigade said, 'You could hear the moans of the wounded and dying wherever you went' (*The Great War - Les Carlyon*, pg. 70)

He was reported 'Missing in Action' on 19 July 1916 after his Battalion made their way into the German trenches. There have been many different accounts of his death.

For Mr Guest there is no doubt: Lieutenant Chinner's body, he believes, lies at Pheasant Wood. The family has unearthed witness accounts of how Lieutenant Chinner was fatally wounded while in the act of throwing a hand grenade. He fell on the bomb, which exploded, possibly in a deliberate act to shield his men from the blast.

An account of Chinner's death
Source: The Flinders News, Shane Mills

Informant states that Lieut. Chinner was bombing Officer. A shell landed in the middle of the bombs at Fleurbaix on July 20th and he was blown to pieces.
Reference:-- Orderly Room Sgt. P. A. Ohlstrom, 416.
32nd Australian Infantry,
Northants War Hospital,
Duston.
Home address:-- Edithburgh, S. Australia.

A message to Eric's parents from the Northants War Hospital about his death
Source: Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files

A bank clerk from the South Australian town of Peterborough, Chinner was just 22 when he died of wounds in German captivity.

Another possible account of his death
Source: The Flinders News, Shane Mills

CHINNER.—On the 20th July, killed in action in France, Lieut. Eric Harding Chinner, beloved son of T. H. and S. Chinner, Peterburg, aged 22 years.
" . . . To do my best from dawn of day till night;
To keep my heart fit for His holy sight,
And answer when He calls—
This is my task."

An obituary notice submitted by Eric's family
Source: The Advertiser, Saturday 2 December 1916

It is impossible to discover now, the truth about Lieutenant Chinner's death. Most of the eyewitnesses reported seeing him cover a bomb with his body, to protect his mates. If this was true, this is an act of extreme courage, friendship and the ANZAC spirit.

THE AUSTRALIANS.

BIOGRAPHICAL

LATE LIEUT. E. H. CHINNER.

PETERSBURG, December 1.—Mr. T. H. Chinner, of Petersburg, has received information concerning the death of his son, Lieut. Eric H. Chinner. In a letter to Mr. Chinner, Lieut. Hardy states that Lieut. Chinner was in the act of throwing a bomb, when he was struck by a bullet on one wrist. He dropped the bomb, and was instantly killed. An officer with him (Lieut. P. Hagan) was shot through the heart. Lieut. Hardy witnessed the death of both these officers. This news totally disproves the official report that Lieut. Chinner died of wounds while a prisoner of war in Germany.

A short account of Lieutenant Chinner's death
Source: The Advertiser, Thursday 10 August 1916

It was also said that Eric was captured by the Germans and taken as a Prisoner of War. This information is doubted because there are many eyewitnesses to his death that say a bomb was the cause. If it was true, then he is still an ANZAC hero. It was reported that when a bomb exploded, he was mortally wounded and could not be reached by his Battalion. He was left out and the Germans collected him and took him as their prisoner. Having the strength to survive long enough to be taken prisoner is an amazing feat. He showed the courage and strength of an ANZAC soldier during his last days and hours.

The ANZAC spirit was very visible within Eric Chinner, especially with his final sacrifice. He gave life to his men by smothering a bomb with his body. Knowing that he would die doing so.

The ANZAC spirit of Eric Harding Chinner

"Lieutenant Eric Chinner, of the 32nd Battalion, died heroically at Fromelles. He was fighting a desperate rear-guard action behind the German lines, holding off the advancing German counter-attack with grenades, when he dropped one in the act of throwing it. He was mortally wounded when he smothered the grenade rather than allow it to harm his men".

(Source: Patrick Lindsay – "Fromelles" – Hardie Grant Books – 2008 – Pages 110 & 123)

In 2008, a mass grave was discovered at Pheasant Wood, Fromelles. Eric's body was buried here by the Germans after he died in either their trenches, or as their prisoner. His body lay with other ANZAC soldiers undisturbed for over ninety years. Many believe that they should have stayed as they have been; undisturbed and respected in their final resting places. All bodies discovered have gone to new graves at Pheasant Wood. Eric's body has been moved to Pheasant Wood and he now has a headstone and final grave. Eric Harding Chinner was mentioned several times in the Fromelles Cemetery Ceremony in 2010 when the 250 soldiers' bodies were re-interred.



"Boots, army badges and belt buckles along with keepsakes and a folded return train ticket from Fremantle to Perth were also recovered from the muddy pits... Providing a fitting burial for the Australian and British soldiers is "the gesture that every nation makes for its heroes," said French General Bruno Cuche."

(WWI dead from mass grave laid to rest in France, Carole Landry (AFP) January 30, 2010)

'LIEUTENANT E. H. CHINNER.
32nd BN AUSTRALIAN INF. 20th JULY, 1916, AGE 22.
WATCHLESS SON AND BROTHER, FOREVER
TENDERLY CHERISHED IN OUR HEARTS'

Most of the soldiers relocated to their final graves are marked as unknown on their headstones.

His family says that he enlisted in the war because he 'fervently believed that aggression and injustice had to be resisted' (Remembering Fromelles – The Final Chapter). A few years after his death, in 1920, his older brother contacted the Department of Defence and requested the specific words engraved upon his headstone (See caption above).

Eric Harding Chinner was a regular man. He grew up in a regular town and had a regular job, but he showed a very special quality. Think back and remember. Remember the horror and destruction. Remember the death and slaughters. Remember all of the young lives lost because of war. Our young men showed courage, determination, and mateship while experiencing these monstrosities first hand. They all had the ANZAC spirit. Whether it be helping a mate out of a trench, lifting their moods and telling jokes when they were at their lowest, even sacrificing themselves for their mates, like Eric did. Putting others before himself; others that he may have only met a few months, weeks, days or hours before he threw himself on a live bomb.

This spirit is what unites our soldiers still today, gives Australia our pride and our determination to achieve the best that we can. Because if we are united, like Eric, his men and all the soldiers who saw death, destruction and horror were, we can survive. Next time that you see a stranger, remember. Remember the sacrifice of the men of our country, of Eric and think. Would you die for them?



World War I soldiers are pictured near the French village of Fromelles

Source: www.dailymail.co.uk

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Author	Year	Title	Publisher	Place
Les Carlyon	2006	The Great War	Pan Macmillan Australia	Sydney
Julie Summers	2010	Remembering Fromelles	CWGC Publishing	Berkshire
Jonathan King	2008	The Western Front	Simon and Schuster	NSW

NEWSPAPERS and JOURNALS

Author	Year	Title of article	Magazine/Journal	Issue No/Date	Page No.
32 nd Battalion	1916	32 nd Infantry Battalion	Australian Imperial Force Unit War Diaries	July 1916	1 - 14
Australian Red Cross	1916	Lieutenant Eric Harding Chinner	Australian Red Cross Society wounded and missing enquiry bureau files www.dailymail.co.uk	1914-18	1 - 27
Robert Hardman	2009	And still they find the fallen: The extraordinary and inspiring operation to identify and honour the hundreds of Tommies just discovered in a mass grave near the Somme		6 th November	1
Pia Ackerman	2008	Locket reunites lost digger with love	www.theaustralian.com.au	14 th June	1
Various Diaries	1915 - 1917	Australian Imperial Forces 8 th Brigade	www.8thbrigade.org.au	15 th September	-
Various	1916 - 1917	Various Titles and excerpts, mainly obituary notices	The Advertiser	Various Dates	-

INTERNET and WEBSITES

Author	Year	Title of Webpage	Viewed Date	URL (location)
National Australian Archives	1915-17	Service Records	Various	www.naa.gov.au
Australian War Memorial	2011	32 nd Battalion	Various	www.awm.gov.au
Matt Anderson	1998	Adapted from the book 'Don't forget me, Cobber!'	16/09/11	www.anzacday.org.au
Army.gov.au	2011	Fromelles	23/07/11	www.army.gov.au/fromelles
Findagrave.com		Pheasant Wood – Eric Harding Chinner	23/07/11	www.findagrave.com
Various authors	2010-11	The Great War Forum – Lt. Eric Harding Chinner 32 nd Btn. AIF	30/07/11	http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums
Unknown		1 st Australian Division – Battles and engagements	04/09/11	http://www.warpath.orbat.com/anzac/1_aus_div.htm

VIDEO/FILM/TV/RADIO

Title	Year	Format	Publisher/Prod. Co.	Place of Production	Special credits if applicable	Broadcast date
Remembering Fromelles - The Final Chapter	2010	DVD	Channel 7	Australia	Reporter – Chris Reason	July 2010
The Lost Diggers	2011	DVD	Channel 7	Australia	Reporter – Ross Coulthart	22/02/11