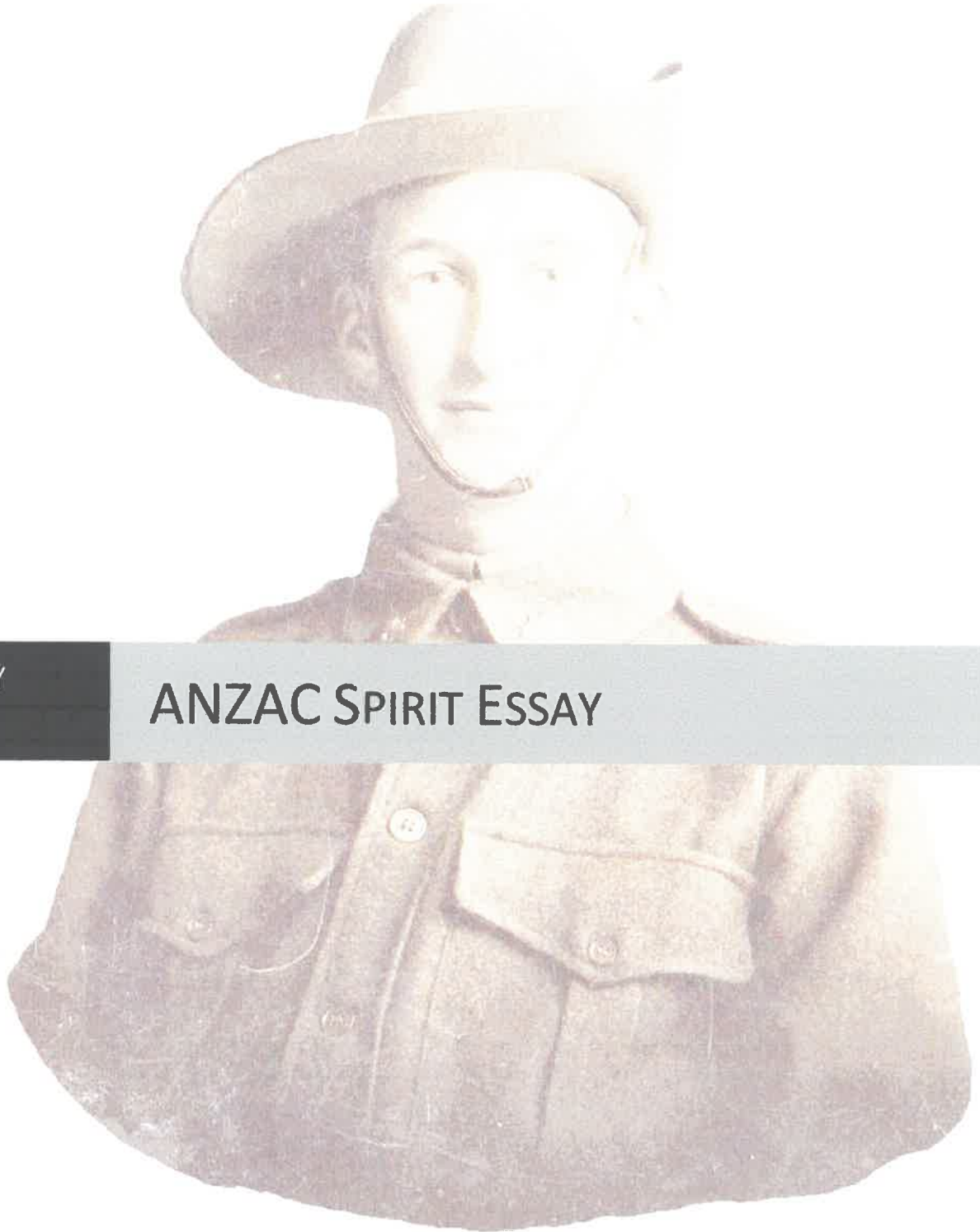


[01 September 2011]



EMILY  
BECK

## ANZAC SPIRIT ESSAY

Frank Lester Beck | Service No. 232

World War One was a major war which began in July of 1914 and spanned officially over four years, killing approximately 16.5 million people across the globe, including civilians.<sup>1</sup> One of the major areas for battle during this time was on the Western Front, an area located between French and German territory. Land was heavily contested in this area, and both the Allies and the Central Powers fought long and hard for any chance of expanding their borders. By the time Australian and New Zealand troops began to arrive on the Western Front in early 1916,<sup>2</sup> the battle was already in full effect. The ANZAC soldiers arrived to the sound of artillery shells being fired and the sight of dead bodies being carried from the battle fields.<sup>3</sup> They were forced to enter straight into the midst of the conflict. Although the tough conditions quickly wore away at many soldiers, it was the true ANZAC spirit of these fighters which helped them to survive under such conditions. This included their incredible bravery and loyalty to their country and fellow soldiers, their courage and endurance and the easy-going, optimistic Australian spirit which helped to lift the mood and morale of soldiers in these difficult times.<sup>4</sup>

One such typical brave Australian ANZAC soldier of the time was a man known as Private Frank Lester Beck. Born in late September of 1890 in the small town of Orroroo (in the Flinders Ranges, South Australia), Frank was a typical country-boy, born to Arthur and Selina Beck and with one older brother (Phil) and sister (Marguerite). He attended the local Orroroo Area School and eventually went on to become a Blacksmith's Strike in his father's workshop. He also had a girlfriend, Valeria Coleman, who was one day to become his wife, and was a keen cricketer who spent many weekends at the local cricket club with his mates.<sup>5</sup> But Beck left all this behind on

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<sup>1</sup> Secker, T. (31 May 2011), World War I and the Cold War, Bordertown High School, [Lecture].

<sup>2</sup> (2011) 'Remembrance Day' [Online]. Australian Government Site.

Available: <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/remembrance-day>

[Accessed 2 June 2011].

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, M. 'The Western Front' [Online]. ANZAC Day.

Available: <http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww1/overview/west.html>

[Accessed 6 June 2011]

<sup>4</sup> Secker, T. World War I and the Cold War.

<sup>5</sup> Beck, Brenda. Personal interview. 15 June 2011.

February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1916, when he travelled to Adelaide to enlist for war.<sup>6</sup> There were many reasons behind Beck's decision to enlist, the most important being his social status at the time. He was a young, fit twenty-five year old man, with neither children nor a wife. The community's strong opinion of the time was that all such men should now be going overseas to fight for their country.

The peer pressure from his mates would have played a large part in this - many of them were going over to war too, and to stay behind would have been considered "weak". In addition to this, the Australian Government at the time was encouraging young men to support their country by enlisting, and emphasising the "good" parts about war through enlistment propaganda.<sup>7</sup> Beck was also already quite keen to sign up himself. He believed that the war would be a great adventure and would give him a great opportunity to see the world whilst helping out Australia.<sup>8</sup>

The first place Beck was sent once officially enlisted was to Grantham, in England, where he completed the basic military and machine-gun training necessary for his position, at Parkhouse camp. He spent almost three months here (from September to December of 1916) before proceeding overseas to France on the "Golden Eagle". He arrived in Boulogne two days later and joined the Machine Gun Base depot in Camiers. Here, Beck was assigned to his position in the 8<sup>th</sup> Machine-Gun Company, a section of the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Division.<sup>9</sup>

Beck joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division for all following tactical missions and battles on the Western Front in France. The first was during the German retreat to the Hindenburg line, which began on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 1917. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division joined in the pursuit of the Germans; skirmishing with their retreating forces.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Soldier Management Agency. (1997) 'Beck, F L' [Online]. National Archives of Australia.

Available: <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=3065050>

[Accessed 1 June 2011]

<sup>7</sup> Secker, T. World War I and the Cold War.

<sup>8</sup> Beck, Brenda. Personal interview.

<sup>9</sup> Soldier Management Agency. 'Beck, F L'.

<sup>10</sup> Mallett, R. 'Fifth Division' [Online n.d.]. Australian Commonwealth Military Forces.

Available: [http://www.aif.adfa.edu.au:8888/5th\\_Division.html](http://www.aif.adfa.edu.au:8888/5th_Division.html)

On May the 5<sup>th</sup>, 1917, the 5<sup>th</sup> Division relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Division in the Second Battle of Bullecourt, holding off against the furious counter-attacks of Germans as the Allies attempted to break through German defences. After Bullecourt fighting subsided on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was withdrawn from battle for a long rest.<sup>11</sup> However, Beck had gained injuries from combat and with the filthy conditions of trenches in battle it was not long before they became infected; leading to a disease called Pericarditis. This, along with severe frost-bite, led to Beck being hospitalised on-and-off for the following few months. He rejoined his division in November of 1917.<sup>12</sup>

Beck stayed with the unit for the rest of the war, although they were not involved in any more major battles until 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1918, when the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> divisions counter-attacked at Villers-Bretonneux, recovering the town from German enemy soldiers and saving its French inhabitants. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of July, the 5<sup>th</sup> Division snuck past German defences in the middle of the night to raid German defences near Morlan Court. They captured and took back 36 machine-guns, two trench systems and 128 German prisoners.<sup>13</sup>

The next battle Beck fought in his division was the Battle of Hamel, in July, 1918. This was a small-scale battle, but was considered very well planned-out and successful. His division was also involved in the Battle of Amiens, in August, 1918. This battle was the opening phase to the Allied attack known as the "Hundred Days Offensive" and was also very successful for the Allies, who broke through the German front lines while simultaneously attacking from behind with tanks.

Shortly after, in early September, 1918, the 5<sup>th</sup> Division Australian corps crossed the Somme River and broke through German lines at Mont St Quentin and Peronne. After this, the division was mainly responsible for holding off against German counter attacks at the Hindenburg line,

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[Accessed 6 June 2011]

<sup>11</sup> Mallett, R. 'Fifth Division'

<sup>12</sup> Soldier Management Agency. 'Beck, F L'.

<sup>13</sup> 'Australian 5<sup>th</sup> Division World War I'. [Online n.d.]. World News.

Available: [http://wn.com/Australian\\_5th\\_Division\\_\(World\\_War\\_I\)](http://wn.com/Australian_5th_Division_(World_War_I))

[Accessed 18 June 2011].

until they left France for the UK on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, 1918.<sup>14</sup> They remained here until the Armistice with Germany was signed on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 1918, marking the end of fighting in World War One.<sup>15</sup>

Beck survived the war and returned to Australia per Port Melbourne on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, 1919. He later received three medals for his service to the military, including the “Victory Medal” the “Star Medal” and the “British War Medal” as an indicator of his bravery and sacrifice.<sup>16</sup>

Frank Lester Beck was truly an example of the brave Australian ANZAC soldier and his actions reflected the ANZAC spirit every step of the way. One major indicator of this was in his courage and determination never to give up. Although Beck suffered for much of the war with his bouts of Pericarditis and war-related injuries, he never gave up or gave any indication of returning home. He simply took one day at a time and remained cheerful despite the grim happenings around him.<sup>17</sup> He also showed amazing loyalty to his country and friends and always put others before himself. This was shown in the way he behaved in battle- looking out for his fellow soldiers as well as himself. Also typical of the ANZAC spirit, Beck and his fellow soldiers managed to find humour in many situations and never took their situation to heart. They would tell jokes, sing songs and share stories- one of Beck’s personal favourites being of a cold winter day on the Western Front in France, where he placed an orange into the pocket of his heavy trench-coat and pulled it out later to eat, only to find it frozen solid!<sup>18</sup>

Beck always managed to keep optimistic about the war and never let it get to him. This attitude eventually paid off on November the 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918, when the Armistice was signed and Allied troops and civilians danced in the streets with joy.<sup>19</sup> Beck’s courageous and loyal behaviour during the war was a great indicator of his ANZAC spirit and he was truly an inspirational example for Allied soldiers.

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<sup>14</sup> Soldier Management Agency. ‘Beck, F L’.

<sup>15</sup> Secker, T. World War I and the Cold War.

<sup>16</sup> Soldier Management Agency. ‘Beck, F L’.

<sup>17</sup> Beck, Brenda. Personal interview.

<sup>18</sup> Beck, Brenda. Personal interview.

<sup>19</sup> Beck, Brenda. Personal interview.

Although World War One was a terrible time for Australian soldiers, their families and friends, it was also a defining moment for us as a nation. As a newly recognised country, many Australians felt that we must prove our worth and bravery to larger nations. Australians wanted to gain the respect and admiration of other countries during the war<sup>20</sup> and they certainly did achieve that.

A fantastic example of this new-gained respect for Australians was in the Villers-Bretonneux, in France, where Beck and his fellow soldiers fought to save the town from Germans. The French citizens of the town were so impressed by this feat of bravery that they later erected a memorial to honour the Australians, as well as inscribing above every school-blackboard in the area "N'oublions jamais l'Australie" (never forget Australia).<sup>21</sup>

Beck may have just been a typical young Australian man before the war, but his actions reflected so much more than that. They showed his honour and dignity, his loyalty to his mates and his country, his spirit and perseverance, and of course his bravery and sacrifice even in the face of death. Frank Lester Beck was truly a great man and one that I am very proud to call my great-grandfather.

1,498 words.

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<sup>20</sup> Secker, T. World War I and the Cold War.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, M. 'The Western Front'

## Related Pictures



A postcard featuring a picture of Frank Lester Beck - sent to his aunt and uncle a day before he left for France in 1916.



A picture of Frank (left) with his sister, Marguerite and his brother, Phil. This is the last remaining photo of Frank before he passed away in 1963.



A small letter opener made by Beck upon his return. It was welded from bullets used WWI.

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