

THE
PREMIER'S
ANZAC
SPIRIT
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By
Grace
Rosemary
Kungel



Lieutenant Chinner's Fiancée: Gladys Dunn



THE
SPIRIT OF
THE
ANZACS

Lieutenant Eric Harding Chinner

“The Spirit of the ANZACs”

By Grace Kungel

War is a time that makes and divides nations. It can create allies and adversaries, it can further a nation's development and it is able to generate a swift increase in economic growth and production. Yet warfare not only affects a nation, but a nation's civilians, a country's people. The affect and threat that war invokes and the inevitability of waging battle creates heroes. Heroes are the people held with reverence and respect for the acts of selfless sacrifice, valiance and gallantry that they perform willingly and honourably. Heroes are formed in the darkest of times and such phenomenon's occurred during the 'Great War' (1914-1918).

Such heroes could be easily located within the valiant ranks of the ANZACs and such champions were found inside our own glorious state; South Australia. Such a hero was South Australia's own Lieutenant Eric Harding Chinner.

As the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, they were the minority in the Great War and held no true connection to the origins of combat. They were involved only for our passionate allegiance to our Commonwealth and pride of our motherland: Britain. This was a fervent dedication, unchanging and an unwavering loyalty to a nation across the seas.

But the majority of those men fighting were not only dedicated to their homeland and the Commonwealth, but also to the loved ones wearily and anxiously waiting back in Australia. This love felt was as fierce as the ANZACs' passion for their own nation and this passion and love was felt between Eric Harding Chinner and his Fiancée: Gladys Dunn.

Lieutenant Chinner was born and raised in the South Australian town of Petersburg (now known as Peterborough) on the 15th of January, 1894. His first career was a Bank Clerk and though it was never known how Gladys and Eric first met, it can be assumed that they first knew of one another through their vocations as Gladys' was a Bank Teller. Their romance was short lived, when disruption loomed with the talk of war first began.

Eric was first enlisted on the 8th of August, 1914 and started training at Fort Largs (Adelaide) and then at Duntroon Military College (Canberra) in the April of 1915 and studied at Randwick in New South Wales (a school for machine gun operation). After his course was completed, he returned to Mitcham in South

Australia and entered the AIF (the [First] Australian Imperial Force) training camp to instruct new recruits. From this, Eric was appointed Second Lieutenant on the 7th of October in 1915 and thus was titled First Lieutenant on the 21st of March 1916; the same day he was posted to the 32nd Battalion.

It is not known what the lovers' reactions were to this stationing, though it can be believed that the approach of Eric's involvement into the War was an alarm or wake-up call to the both of them: as though the past two years and the approach of war was only a dream.

Engaged and in love, Lieutenant Eric Harding Chinner left Gladys on the 18th of November, 1916 on the ship HMAT A2 *Geelong* sailing to Egypt with his 32nd Battalion at the young and innocent age of 21. In Egypt, Lieutenant Chinner's force joined the recently founded 5th Division and from this gathering point and decreed safe-zone in Egypt, the 32nd Battalion ensued onto France in June of 1916 to their objective: the notorious and rightly feared Western Front.

One month later, Lieutenant Chinner was involved in what could be described as "the bloodiest and most horrifying battle Australia had ever been involved in during World War One": The Battle of Fromelles. This was the first battle fought by Australians on the Western Front and was also the first conflict entered by the 5th Division and by Lieutenant Chinner. The purpose of the battle was to create a distraction to the German Imperial Force and to avert them from thinning and slowly destroying the Triple Entente's forces on areas of the Western Front.

The battle's length was only a two day period: the 19th to the 20th of July, 1916, yet that did not stop the soaring fatality and casualty rates inflicted from this harsh and ruthless skirmish.

Lieutenant Chinner's 5th division and 61st division attacked the German forces at 6pm on the night of July 19th. No expectation was held nor true awareness as to what oncoming slaughter was facing them as only three days after landing on the front line trenches these divisions were to front the attack. The *mêlée* was long, and sickening and within 24 hours an estimated 5, 553 soldiers were either missing in action, injured or dead. In the skirmish, approximately 90% of the 32nd Battalion's strength was lost.

At first, it was believed that Lieutenant Chinner died within the initial battle though other claims were raised that a shell landed by him and he was shredded to pieces by the explosion and its shrapnel. From these allegations, the truth finally surfaced. Eric Harding Chinner was found to have died in a German Prisoner of War camp after being mortally wounded on the 20th of July, 1916 though no grave was initially found. He was only twenty-two years old.

As recently uncovered by the Press and by French and Australian historians alike, a mass German war-grave has been discovered in Pheasant Wood, Fromelles, France. In this grave, Lieutenant Eric Harding Chinner's remains were finally found after almost 100 years of being unnamed, unknown and forgotten. He was marked by the Red Cross as "Wounded and Missing" though in his absence he received the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Though Eric died, his fiancée Gladys lived on until she sadly died in her late nineties. The possession she loved most and departed with only in the event of death was the locket Eric gave her containing a miniature photo of her love with his initials and school emblem.

Eric died without a wife, without knowing the love of a child and without being able to experience the true beauty life can hold. Eric never got the chance to see life after the war, to see the freedom he and his men created and to be shown that life is not just war, death and killing but also beauty, birth and love. Though he experienced a portion of such love not only with his fiancée but with his comrades in arms: his brothers.

We all owe part of our current way of life to the men and women of the First World War and I feel sickened by those who refuse to remember their names and their stories. Only by understanding the past can we create a better future. These individuals have helped to forge that path. Those who do not honour nor respect them do not deserve the freedom they have created. We as South Australians are obliged to respect those who have made South Australia what it is and have delineated Australia to the rest of the World

They have sent a message to all: Australians are behind their allies to the end and they will not leave a fight until their duty is completed. The recent Iraq war is testament to their fighting spirit.

We must honour those of the past and lessons they have taught us and we must in the name of their souls and the woe of their loved ones bring these lessons to the future as reminders of our mistakes of the past.

I shall always honour the spirit of the ANZACs and what they have done for our country as I regard Lieutenant Eric Harding Chinner a hero. A hero and an ANZAC that shall always be remembered in the hearts of Australians.

As:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

*We will remember them. **

From "For the Fallen" By *Laurence Binyon*

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