

PREMIER'S ANZAC SPIRIT PRIZE 2022

Gunner Aza Lenden King
Service Number: SX10606

2/14 Field Regiment



Kenzie King
Year 10
Loxton High School

Part A: Word Count: 1500 words

Gunner King feared an attack was imminent, however when it came, he had no idea how unprepared they would be. Early on February 19th 1942, Aza witnessed the first US Kitty Hawk shot down, crashing just off of Night Cliff. In disbelief, they radioed Darwin of the terror the regiment had witnessed. Soon after, at 9:58 am, the sky above the harbour filled with Japanese aeroplanes. With 188 enemy incoming warplanes ready for assault, this would be cemented in history as the first and biggest attack ever to reach Australian soil.

Aza's ANZAC spirit could not be confined to the battlefield and is something he will always be remembered for. Aza Lenden King, my Great Grandfather, was born on the 24th of October 1919 in Aldinga, South Australia. He was the eldest child of Lenden Althelbert and Doris Stella King. He had 3 younger siblings, Eunice May, Kempley Kelvin and Inman Frederick. (See Figure 1). Aza served during some of Australia's most trying times, in WWII.



Figure 1: Aza 4 years, Eunice 2 years, and Kempley 6 months (King, 2021).



Figure 2: Aza, 3 years old, in his family's Moorook vineyard (King, 2021).

Aza's father Lenden, served in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), as part of the infantry division, in WW1. Sadly, Lenden was shot in the thigh and wounded whilst serving in France and was discharged from service, setting an example of both service and the ANZAC spirit for his children.

Upon Lenden's return from France, he was given land in Yinkannie, South Australia, by the government for his war service and later relocated to Moorook (See Figure 2). From the age of 3, Aza lived in a house built of limestone with two rooms (See Figure 3). As the eldest, he was a leader and helped out his family on the fruit block. It was mostly grapes; sultanas and currants and a few fruit trees (See Figure 4). The family had horses, cows, dogs and a cat, which Aza was responsible for.

Aza attended Moorook Primary School from 1926-1932. He showed perseverance as he was expected to walk to school every day and take the cows to and from school for agistment (See Figure 5). This was approximately an 8 kilometre walk each way, barefoot. Aza would come home each day exhausted, with the soles of his feet red and raw, but knew he had to do it for his family.



Figure 3: The Soldier Settlement house and fruit block in Moorook, where Aza lived, 1922 (King, 2021).



Figure 4: Aza and his family in front of their grape drying racks, 1930 (King, 2021).



Figure 5: Aza and his family milking the cows, 1925 (King, 2021).

After leaving school in year 7 (See Figure 6), he worked on his father's fruit block. He learnt valuable skills for farming and agriculture from his father and developed a hard work ethic. They worked tirelessly using a horse and plough to cultivate the land (See Figure 7). Aza learnt early on how to work hard no matter the circumstances, contributing to his resilience and perseverance on the battlefield.



Figure 6: Aza's grade 7 graduation certificate, Moorook Primary School, 1932 (King, 2021).



Figure 7: Aza using the horse and plough on his farm in Moorook (King, 2021).



Figure 8: (From right) Aza, his father Lenden, and brother Inman, as he was preparing to leave for the war, 1940 (King, 2021).

Aza enlisted in December 1940 as a 21-year-old with the outbreak of WW2, demonstrating immense courage knowing the reality of war from his father's experience. He joined the 2/14th Regiment as Gunner King SX 10606 (See Figure 8).

Aza enlisted at Wayville and was part of the regiment's 28 Battery from South Australia. He trained at Woodside in the artillery until February 1941 (See Figure 9), later moving to Puckapunyal and joining the 27 Battery. Aza used 18-powder guns and 4.5-inch howitzers in his training (Jackson, 1997). With most of the 8th division already dispatched overseas, the regiment was transferred to Winnellie Camp, Darwin, NT (See Figure 10). This move was initially considered temporary to 'acclimatise' the soldiers with the tropical weather (Australian War Memorial, 2021), an opportunity to build mateship with his comrades (See Figure 11).

28th BATTERY WOODSIDE 1941



B.H.Q. 28th BATTERY

Figure 9: The 2/14th Field Regiment, 28 Battery in Woodside, Aza, second row, second from far right (The Broken Eighth, Jackson, pg. 10, 2021)



Figure 10: Aza working in Darwin (King, 2021).



Figure 11: Aza struggling to acclimatise to the weather in Darwin (King, 2021).



Figure 12: Aza standing in a bomb crater in Darwin (King, 2021).

With the majority of the 8th division serving in South-East Asia and the Pacific, they were faced with Japan's entry into the war. Those who survived the Japanese onslaught, were captured, and had to endure 3 ½ years as Prisoners of War. Incredibly, Aza's field regiment were the only major combat unit of the 8th division that were not captured. On the 19th of February 1942, Darwin was bombed by the Japanese for the first time (Library and Archives NT, n.d.) (See Figure 12 and 13). This went down in history as the first and largest attack to reach our soil. When the bombs came through, the trees blew in the air like matchsticks (Ey, 2021). 188 enemy war planes released bombs on Darwin, they didn't discriminate. The bombs rained down and sank 13 ships and an estimated 900 people were killed on the wharf and ships (Australian War



Figure 13: Aza and his regiment cleaning up after the bombing in Darwin (King, 2021).

Memorial, 2021). During the bombing, Aza's field regiment were setting up defences at Nightcliff (See Figure 14). Aza witnessed the first plane to be shot down, a US Kitty Hawk.

For the next 6 months, Aza remained in Darwin (See Figure 15), completing tactical training, calibration, and regimental shoots. Unfortunately, Aza never acclimatised to the oppressive, hot, humid conditions in Darwin, but with perseverance, he always fulfilled his duties. This was a far cry from the mild weather conditions he experienced growing up. "My bloody singlet used to rot off my back!" he used to say (King, 2021).

The time spent in Darwin, could not have prepared him for the harsh conditions, as he embarked on his first overseas service. In December 1943, Aza travelled to Lae, New Guinea, which was being established as a major base for the Australian operations. Travelling by troopship, Aza landed in New Britain supporting infantry patrolling and for the first time, Gunner King, faced the enemy. All of his training had led up to this moment. Aza, and all remaining Battalions, launched what was one of the most conclusive and costly assaults of the campaign, by night the garrison was wiped out. Although they suffered heavy casualties, they fought with such determination that nothing could stop them. One night Aza jumped off his hammock to investigate a noise, sealing his fate. He turned to see a bullet hole directly in the middle of his hammock. He knew he was lucky to be alive. This traumatic overseas experience impacted Aza's decision to never travel overseas again.

Aza was relieved to return to his country in February 1946 after the war ended. Aza served 710 days overseas and a total of 1894 days for the Imperial Army and his country (See Figure 16, 17 and 18). This time of service continued to haunt Aza and it was not something he spoke of. However, he would fondly remember and recount stories of life-long friends and the mateship they shared.



Figure 14: Night cliffs in Darwin, where Aza's regiment was situated (King, 2021).

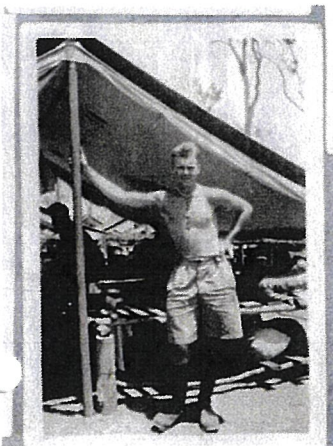


Figure 15: Aza's camp in Darwin (King, 2021).

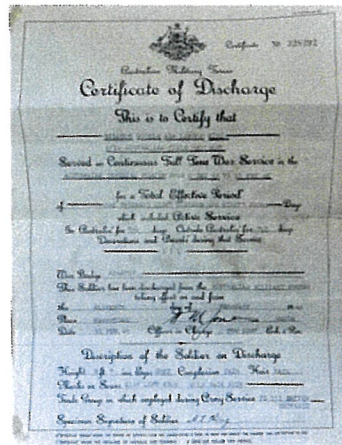


Figure 16: Aza's certificate of discharge in 1946 (King, 2021).



Figure 17: Aza after being discharged from the war with a fellow war veteran. (King, 2021).



Figure 18: Aza war medals (King, 2021).

In 1946 Aza returned home to Glossop, where he worked in the local packing shed and as a block aide. He settled back into life, like the suffering of war had never happened. On his arrival back home, one of his sister's friends Ethel 'Peg' Kruse caught his eye. Aza had to learn a different form of perseverance that wasn't taught in the army to win Peg's heart.

Aza married the love of his life, Peg, in 1947 (See Figure 19). They lived together in a small house on his father's property. In 1948, the war service scheme for returned soldiers started in Loxton (King, 2021). Aza and Peg were excited to make a home when he was offered a lease.



Figure 19: Aza and Peg, 1947, on their honeymoon in Ballarat (King, 2021).

He built a 3-room corrugated shed as their home. The first settlers in the district had a great sense of mateship. Neighbour helped neighbour and soon the block was planted and ready for trellis. Aza would get up at daybreak and work until he had dug and rammed his quota for the day. He never complained and displayed endless perseverance, as his days were incomparable to the hardship he had to endure throughout the war.

In 1948, Aza and Peg's first child (my grandfather), David Aza King was born, and Noelene Doris King was born in 1953. During this time, Aza supported his family in their individual sports, was involved in the local rifle shooting club, enjoyed family caravanning and was a keen fisher and boater. Aza utilised his skills learnt from the army and spent his time fixing everything.

Aza and Peg moved to Loxton in 1978 and became semi-retired. For many years Aza still travelled out to the fruit block that his son David now owns, helping out at the busy times of harvest and pruning (See Figure 20). He continued to do physical labour, even in his elderly years, this work ethic was cemented in him from his father and his war service.

Aza's wife Peg passed away in 1981 at only 56. Aza was Pa King to 6 grandchildren (See Figure 21), and now has a total of 6 great grandchildren (one of them being me).

Aza passed away at home in June 2003 at the age of 83 (King, 2021). Aza was a hardworking, self-motivated, family orientated man, who was a great father and grandpa. I am proud to be his Great Granddaughter and I wish I had the opportunity to meet him. He showed an immense amount of perseverance and mateship throughout his life. He reflected the ANZAC Spirit Prize characteristics through his sense of courage, mateship, humour, perseverance, leadership, and mateship.

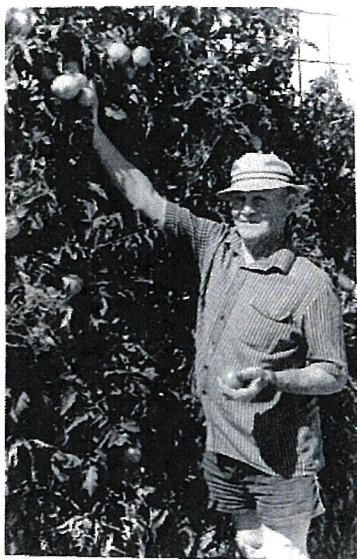


Figure 20: Aza on his fruit block, still enjoying working after retirement (King, 2021).

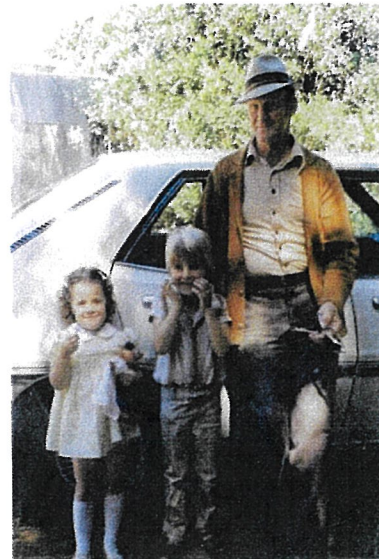


Figure 21: Aza with his grandchildren (my mother Kobie, and my uncle Jesse) in 1981 (King, 2021).

Part B: Word Count: 494 words

My immediate thought when thinking of a war veteran reflecting ANZAC spirit was my Great Grandfather, Aza Lenden King. I knew he would be the perfect choice as he is very closely related to me, and I was passionate about learning more about him and his experiences in WWII. As Aza died 4 years before I was born, I was determined to inform myself, as all who have met him have expressed their love and admiration for him. Family members and friends frequently tell me how Pa King and I are very much alike. Recently, many people have commented on how much I look like him, particularly his photo in his army uniform, and I can see the resemblance. I've been told that I also possess many of his qualities, intriguing my research.

Initially I began my research using websites such as the Virtual War Memorial and the National Archives of Australia to document the basic grounding information of Aza. I found his birth and death dates, public records, enlistment and discharge dates, his role in the army as a gunner, and his service number. I began to take notes and piece together a timeline with some general information.

I am very fortunate to have many family members direct descendants of Aza, so I could get an insight into his life. My mum, as Aza's granddaughter, could recall many memories and stories Aza told, supporting my research. My Papa, David (Aza's son), had a detailed knowledge of his father's life both before and after the war. He also has many of Aza's keepsakes including photo albums, war memorabilia and medals, letters from war, and his collection of war books. These primary sources allowed me to connect with Aza's experience in the war, as this part of his life was something Aza preferred not to speak of. I also interviewed my mum's auntie, Noelene (Aza's daughter) and my Uncles Jesse and Cale (Aza's Grandsons) to collect personal stories and information. I extended my research by interviewing my sister Adison, who entered Aza's father Lenden in the ANZAC Spirit Prize, to learn about Aza's childhood and family life. I also learnt of how Lenden instilled the ANZAC spirit into his children and inspired them to serve their country in uniform. Aza, Kempsey, and Eunice all served in WWII.

It was very difficult to find information on Aza's regiment, the 2/14. I gathered information about his time during the war from secondary sources, including websites and books such as *The Broken Eighth* and *The History of World War II*. These sources allowed me to piece together Aza's war service story in more detail.

This research has allowed me to gain an insight into soldiers serving on the frontline and have a greater understanding of the war. I will forever appreciate the selfless heroes who gave their life to their country. It has been a rewarding experience to learn about Pa King and share it with my family.

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Photos:

All photos are sourced from Aza's personal family photobooks.