

2013 Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize

Clarence Liddle

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ANZAC Day

"This is a day not of celebration but of national memory. It's a day when we learn, and learn again, of the horror of purposeless war. It is a day for looking after your mates, cherishing your home, your neighbourhood and family ... It's a day for realising how rare this wonderful country of ours is and how precious it is."

- Bob Carr, Premier of NSW



Clarence Liddle



Figure 1: Clarence Liddle ¹

The ANZAC spirit is the possession of the following qualities: courage, to enter the battlefields, the willingness to sacrifice one's own life for others and mateship to help allies in a time of need. It also comprises of unselfishness and respect towards fellow ANZACS. The determination to succeed and endurance to fight until the very end. I believe Clarence Liddle was an exemplar of the ANZAC Spirit; sacrifice, dedication, character and the appreciation of our beautiful country.

Like myself, Clarence Liddle was brought up as a typical country boy. He was born in Angaston, South Australia on the 1st of September, 1895. Growing up in a country town was an advantage that Clarence Liddle, at the time, may not have known until he arrived on the Western Front. The advantage gained by Clarence was the understanding of the hardships that country families face as we do here in the Riverland. Such as the need for resourcefulness towards equipment, food and money, as times get tough. The appreciation of good traits including manners, trust, honesty, and punctuality were as important then as they are now. To me, these are the advantages gained from growing up in a humble country family and they also helped Clarence to typify the ANZAC spirit in his service for Australia on the Western Front.

Clarence, being my Nan's uncle, was described by her as "peaceable and withdrawn"². Having grown up in Angaston, he was surrounded by the rolling grape vines and the smell of the seasonal harvests like we have here in the Riverland. As a child, Clarence enjoyed spending time with his three older siblings, using imagination to make up their own games, as most country kids do when growing up in isolated towns.

Clarence enlisted into the Australian Imperial Force at the Keswick barracks, in South Australia at the tender age of nineteen years on the 5th of May 1915. At the time, Clarence had a steady job as a gardener, which was a labour intensive occupation. He had to do everything manually and didn't have the equipment we have today. Only nineteen, he had never even been interstate, let alone overseas. He saw war as a great opportunity for an adventure while at the same time earning an income and serving his country. No doubt, his parents, Matilda Ann and Thomas Foster Liddle would have felt anguish as any parents would when their nineteen year old son was about to go to war. This was a time when Clarence

¹ Australian War Memorial, photo collections, accessed 13 August 2012, <http://cas.awm.gov.au/item/P03236.220>

²Peberdy, J 2012, personal communication, (26th of August).



Figure 2: Map of the Pozieres battlefield²

could have chosen to stay back in Australia, start a family and set a solid foundation for his future. Instead, he showed great initiative and courage to fight for his country.

Clarence was enlisted in the 10th Battalion which embarked from Adelaide to Cairo, on the 2nd of September 1915, to the Australian Imperial Force's international training ground. The Battalion then departed Egypt on the 28th of March, 1916 with the destination being the village of Pozieres (Figure 2).

This was a pivotal battle for Australia in the Great War, and was a key to the success of the Somme battles. Although Australia was successful, it proved to be one of the bloodiest battles on the Western Front for the ANZACS. Clarence's Battalion, alongside the 9th, 11th and 12th made up the 3rd Brigade. At midnight on the 22nd of July

1916 the ANZACS fought intense trench battles to force their way into Pozieres. Australian Sergeant Ben Champion sums up the feeling for soldiers who were soon to engage in the battle, *"Soon we came to an area with the sickly smell of dead bodies, and half-buried men, mules and horses came into view. Here was war wastage properly. Germans and British mixed together, lying in all positions, and there wasn't a man but thought more seriously of what was ahead"*³. For me, these are incomprehensible images that must have stayed in Clarence's head for the rest of his life.

The 1st Division were able to successfully put the Germans on the back foot in Pozieres through their outstanding gallantry. Clarence, being naïve, would have had to quickly adapt to the unimaginable conditions which the war brought. Following the capture of Pozieres, one of the many counter attacks from the equally determined Germans, through continuous shelling and fire put the ANZACS under significant pressure. Being able to fight in these conditions required tremendous resilience because men in the trenches were waist high in mud and moving forward required passing the massive holes left by the shells that left the village in rubble. Captain Harris from the 3rd battalion describes the night, *"As fast as one portion of the trench was cleared another was blown in. There were no dugouts in which men on post could take shelter, and the only thing to do was to grin and bear it"*.⁴

The 1st Division was relieved on the 26th of July after suffering a horrendous 5,285 casualties⁵. On the 7th of August, the ANZACS were finally able to hold off the last counter attack made by the Germans. The 1st Division then moved onto the battle at Mouquet Farm, this was where Clarence was reported

³ Carlyon, Les, 2006, *The Great War*, Macmillan, Sydney, Page 130 and 134

⁴ Finding Family (2012), Edwin Mordan Neale, accessed 25th of August 2012, <http://ancestrysearch.wordpress.com/2011/07/08/edward-mordan-neale/>

⁵ Phillips, Bill, 2001, 'France 1916-1917', Phillips Publications, Coffs Harbour

missing alongside 111⁶ other soldiers in the 10th Battalion between the 19th to the 23rd of August 1916; and he officially became a Prisoner of War when he was captured by the German Army.

Clarence was taken to the POW camp in Dülmen, Germany (Figure 3) and stayed there until the 27th of September 1916. He was then moved to the Münster POW camp in Germany, where he stayed until the war was over. This must have been a terrifying situation because Clarence had no power in the way the German Army treated him. For someone of his age, he showed great maturity to keep his morale high, clearly a great example of the ANZAC spirit. If I were in his position, I would have been distraught not knowing how the war was progressing and if I was ever going to survive.



Figure 3: The Dülmen Prisoner of War camp⁷

After engagement on the Western Front, Clarence returned to Australia on the 5th of March 1919 with conflicting emotions, a mix of relief and trauma from the events of which he had just been a part. Clarence was awarded the British War Medal, Victory Medal and the 1914/15 Star Medal for his contribution to his country. Clarence and his ANZAC mates fought so hard to protect this beautiful country and without their efforts, life certainly would not be as good for us as it is today.

Private Clarence Liddle embodied the ANZAC spirit in his short, but pivotal role in the battles on the Western Front. He showed the ANZAC spirit from the day he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in the bravery and determination showed when entering the Western Front. Once he returned to Australia he resided in Netherby, South Australia. He was employed as a gardener at Government House. Clarence married Philadelphia Frances Childs at the Parkside West, Methodist church on the 17th of November 1921. Nan described him after the war as, "a lovely and peaceful man who went about his business in his own way". She also stated that he never gave details of the war, probably due to the traumatic nature of his experiences on the Western Front. He was withdrawn and loved to be by himself looking after his passion, his garden in the back yard. He passed away on the 20th of November 1972 and will always be admired by family and friends as an honourable man who fought for all the right reasons to protect Australia.

⁶Australian War memorial(2012), "3rd Brigade casualties report", accessed 21 August 2012, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/records/awm4/23/3/awm4-23-3-10.pdf>

⁷ Australian War Memorial (2012), "Dülmén", accessed 17 August 2012, <http://cas.awm.gov.au/item/P01981.059>

Only being a few years younger than the youngest service men and women who served on the Western Front, it is my responsibility to embrace all the opportunities that come my way, in honour of all ANZACS who did not make it back to their home shores. I was once in the position where I was unable to do many of the things everyone else took for granted. When I was seven I was diagnosed with a rare case of tinea which killed many hair follicles on my head. This entailed many six hour day trips to Adelaide, to attend specialist appointments and surgery. During a period of five years, I was unable to participate in football, basketball and many activities which I loved. I was determined to get back to those sports as soon as possible and reach the levels my peers had. Whilst clearly not as horrific as fighting in the war, in experiencing this challenge, I had to show qualities of the ANZAC spirit. Namely, sacrifice towards what I was able to do, determination to catch up on everything I had missed and courage to show my head at school and in public. The experience gave me even greater respect for what the ANZACS achieved under unimaginable pressure and circumstance.

It is the duty of not only me, but every young Australian to continue to pass on the ANZAC spirit which the Australian soldiers fought so bravely to protect. In my opinion, Clarence Liddle is a perfect example of how to embody the ANZAC spirit. This spirit will live on through future generations, with its history firmly set in stone. 'Lest We Forget'.

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