

# ANZAC School Spirit Prize

By Emily Hicks

During the time of the Great War, Australia joined in to help out the "old country". Many young Australians signed up during this intense time and one of the first from our local area was Benhart "Ben" Alfred Gabel of the Angaston/Greenock area. Before the war Ben was a gardener with German heritage, like most people who lived in the Barossa Valley. He was the typical of most Germans in his appearance as he had fair skin, fair hair and blue eyes. He was only 21 years old when he signed up and the only boy of his father's first marriage. His family lived on a large property in Angaston and ran a fruit orchard. Through my research and talking to a niece of Ben's I got a copy of a letter sent to his stepmother from when he was still on the boat. He says they were having good weather and how he never got sick unlike others on the journey. He also says how much he is missing the fruit and to give his love to Marlie a girl I think he loved as well as love for Grandfather and the others. He signs off calling her mother and saying "From your son, Ben: which makes me think they had a close relationship.

Ben enlisted on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1914 at Morphettville, South Australia and was put on the Nominal Roll on the 12<sup>th</sup> of that month. He was placed in the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was three quarters Western Australians and the rest South Australians. Ben trained in Victoria before embarking overseas on Boxing Day, 1914. His battalion was led by Lieutenant Colonel Howard Pope and put in the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade with the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was led by Colonel now Sir John Monash. Together they arrived in Egypt in early February 1915.

In Egypt they were joined by the New Zealand Army and became part of the New Zealand and Australian Division. From Egypt, the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved on to Gallipoli. They landed late afternoon on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1915. Ben was in Gallipoli for one week before dying from being hit by a shell. His remains were buried near the junction of Shrapnel and Monash's Gully. During this time of Ben's death, the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved by the 15<sup>th</sup> battalion on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April and was having two days rest until a night attack on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May. For this night attack the battalion was thrown into the attack on Bloody Angle and suffered many other casualties. During their two days rest they lost 50 soldiers to enemy sniper fire. Ben was on a fatigue party road making on the day he died. The day he died there was heavy rifle fire from the enemy between 7pm and 8pm. From May to August the battalion was heavily involved in establishing and defending the front line of the ANZAC beachhead. In August the 4<sup>th</sup> brigade attacked Hill 971. The hill attack came at a great cost and the Turkish reinforcements forced the Australians to withdraw. The 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion served at ANZAC Cove until the evacuation in December when it returned to Egypt.

On return to Egypt this Battalion went through some changes due to the AIF expanding and reorganising. The battalion was split and provided experienced soldiers for the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade while the rest formed the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Division along with the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Brigades. In June 1916 they moved from Egypt to France and the Western Front. They were there until 1918 and took part in bloody trench warfare. After continued action in France, Private Martin O'Meara was awarded the Battalion's first Victoria Cross. The second Victoria Cross for the Battalion was awarded to Lance Corporal Tom Axford in June 1918.

At 11am on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1918 all guns fell silent and later that month all members of AIF began to return to Australia for demobilisation and discharge. The 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered 1127 deaths and 1955 wounded, many soldiers were gassed. The battalion's leader until 1916, Lieutenant Colonel Howard Pope, wrote a letter called "Old Sixteen" that I feel gives respect and honour for his battalion. It reads,

"And so my dear old comrades all of Gallipoli, I wish you all farewell. No one could have hoped to have seen greater bravery and endurance in human nature than I have seen in the officers and men of the 16th, and many times that bravery saved us and many others from disaster".

The Gallipoli Campaign is a major part of Australia's history. When fighting on the Western Front in France during 1914 came to a stalemate, the British War Council thought Germany would best be defeated if its allies Austria, Turkey and Hungary were attacked. At first the attack on Turkey was meant to be a naval operation but the British Cabinet thought land forces could be used. At dawn on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 1915 the ANZACs landed north of Gaba Tepe (now known as ANZAC Cove) while British forces landed at Cape Helles on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The campaign lasted for exactly 8 months, 2 weeks and 1 day before silence came over Gallipoli.

War has changed this world into the place it is now. But with war, communities and families are affected in many ways. For example my grandmother's father served in World War II. His wife was pregnant at the time with twin girls. Not only did he miss the birth of his twin daughters but he missed their early years. He chose to go fight for his country not knowing if he would ever meet his daughters. He left his wife with two baby girls on a dairy farm that needed to be run. Daily life for his wife was hard running the dairy farm, milking cows daily and looking after two baby girls. Life was hard on all families and community though. Doctors, teachers and many other important people were departing to go to war leaving the towns without them. Every community suffered loss of services as well as the loss of the sons, daughters, husbands, wives, fathers and mothers making it hard to live through this time. Most communities were not only suffering for loss of services but had rationed food. There was no way to avoid the war completely and it affected everyone in some way.

From a letter from Ben to his stepmother, my research, talking to family and RSL members as well as my own beliefs and opinions I think I have found what ANZAC spirit is. Some words that describe this are comradeship, mateship, brotherhood, solidarity, courage, respect, ingenuity, larrikinism and overall the fighting spirit that all ANZAC's represent. Quotes and letters I feel are the best way to say ANZAC spirit because they are from the ANZAC's. A quote I found is "When you go home tell them of us and say "For your tomorrow, we gave our today"". This quote is my favourite of all of them as it means for all the diggers lives we lost they gave us our tomorrow, our future and without them where and what would we be now.

ANZAC doesn't just mean diggers from The Great War but all diggers who volunteer their life to save ours. Even if we are strangers to them they are prepared to give up their life, seeing their family, and they do this knowing they may never return home. Corporal Scott James Smith, also from the Barossa Valley, lost his life in action when an Improvised Explosive Device detonated during an operation in Northern Helmand province on 21 October, 2012. He lost his life serving his country and this was a great loss to his family leaving behind his parents and his soul mate. He was a past student of my school; Nuriootpa High school, and his memory is now part of the school's war memorial.

ANZAC spirit to me is being willing to give up your life to save our country, our people, as well as other countries and their people. Every person who is willing to do that has that ANZAC spirit. Ben gave his life to help fight the Turks leaving behind a loving family and a lover Marlie; Scott gave his life fighting in Afghanistan leaving his devoted parents and his partner, Liv. All the diggers that went through the horrible Kokoda Track in World War 2 and the people who helped clean up Darwin when it got bombed in 1942 are also showing great amounts the ANZAC spirit. But to have ANZAC spirit you don't have to give up your life and die for your country, or even be in the army, air force or navy you just have to show respect for the people that are giving their life. They do this on their own merit but as Australians we wouldn't have such a beautiful country without them.

1480 words



Benhart Alfred Gabel. Originally sourced from Angaston Historical Society.

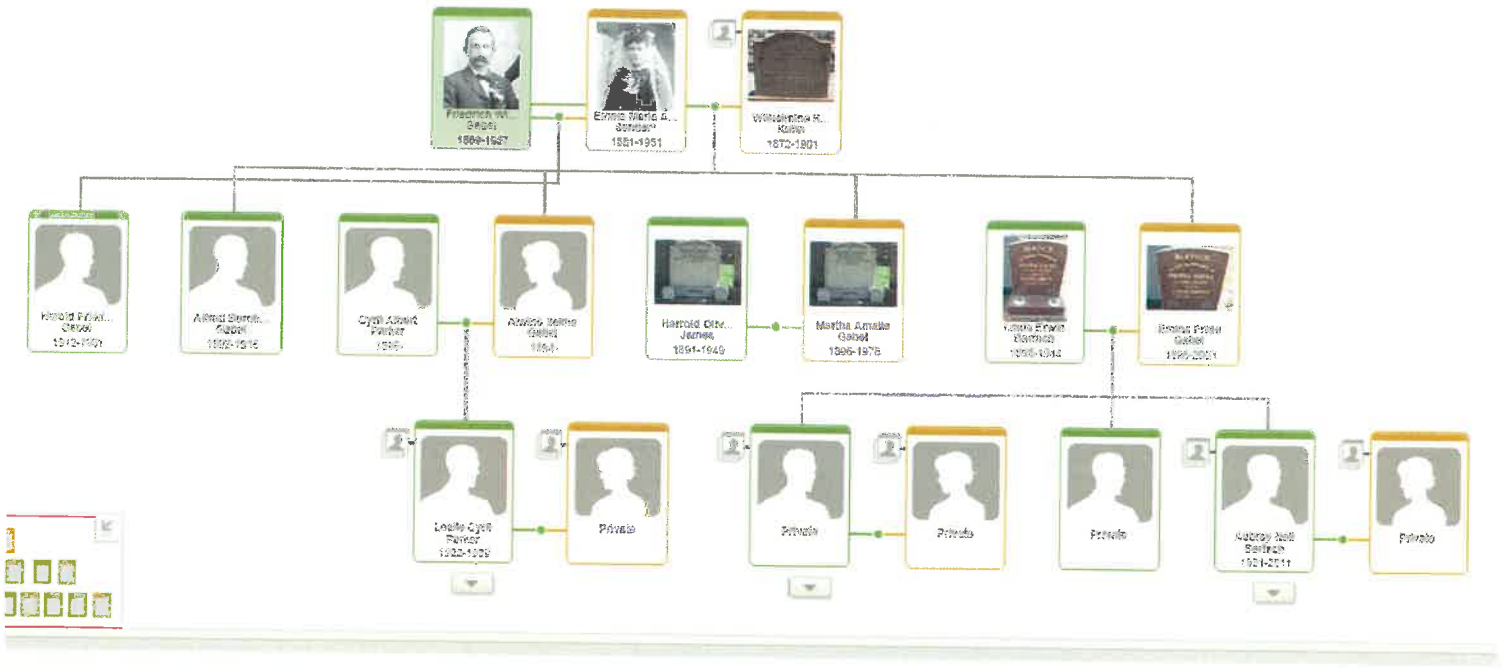
## Appendix

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still on the journey & enjoying it. We are having some good weather, but it is getting warmer every day. We don't know where we are & don't know we are going, but that won't make much difference as long as we get to the old country. I haven't been sea sick so far but had a bad cold for a few days, but I am getting over that. I was vaccinated the other day, but that was nothing, my arm has started to itch so it must have taken. There are not many letters to tell you the same thing over every day & I am getting tired of it, but wish I was on land again. I miss the fruits alright & I suppose you are enjoying it. & how are the water melons going Dutch I had a couple now, they would go well & would suit me a bit, but I suppose I will be back in time for them next year. I haven't time to write any other letters, so I wish could tell everybody that I am alright & write to him when I get the chance. I close with this. Hoping you all at home are in good health as it leaves me. & let Morrie know how I am getting & give her my love. & I suppose she is still at Holtz's. Give my love to grandfather & the others at home. ~~xxx~~

With best love xxx  
From your son  
Ben

Letter from Benhart to his stepmother. The letter arrived on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1915. I got this from Julie Martin a descendant of Bens.



Sourced from [www.mundia.com/au/](http://www.mundia.com/au/)

Red Cross Records sourced from Australian War Memorial Website

Bevra

19th Aug. 1916.

16th AUSTRALIANS

GABSL B.A. 1273

C Co.

(Med. List)

May 9/15 Details D. & B.

Gabsl was shot through the chest by bullet and died instantly. I saw him; he was laid out at the back of the trench. This happened early in May 1915. I am quite certain of his death. We held the ground. I cannot say where he was buried.

Informant Sgt. R.A. Noble 320  
16th A.I.F. C Co. XI pltn.  
Camp 2

R.D.K.

a

A.I.F. 16th. Battalion.

now K/A 2.5.15.

GABEL.

Pte. B.A.

1273.

C. Coy

"K.I.A. May 5th. 1918"

Berthart Alfred.

I saw him killed when on a fatigue party, road making. I was in charge of the party. He was killed by a piece of shell at the junction of Shrapnel and McNash's Gully, and a rough cross erected with his full particulars on.

Description:- Fair, about 24 yrs of age, medium height, came from South Aus.

Informant:- C23.M. Stewart, 1349.  
48th. Battn. late 16th. Bn.

Home address. G.P.O. Adelaide.

D.R. Tomley.  
Searcher. S.S. "Main".

A.

J.E.A.  
Ldn. Cn.  
27.9.19.

16th Battalion

GABEL Pte B.A.  
1273

Killed in action May 5th 1915

I saw him killed when on a fatigue party road-making I charge of the party. He was killed by a piece of shell at the junction of Shrapnel and Monash's Gully and a rough cross was erected with his full particulars Description Fair, about 24 years of age, medium height, came from South Australia

Inf. C.S.M. Stewart 1349  
48th Battn late 16th Battn

Address G.P.O. Adelaide

D.R. Tomley

H.M.A.P. Main

11-10-1919