

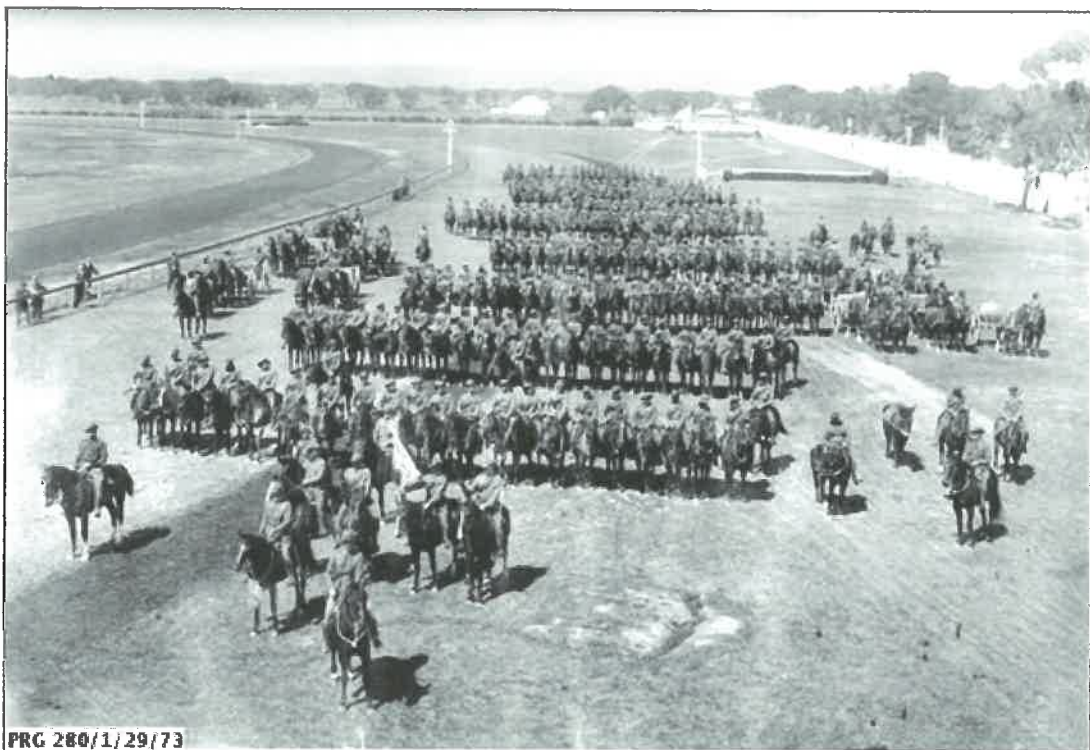
Premier's ANZAC School

Spirit Prize 2015



April Burdon

Loxton High School



PRG 280/1/29/73

3rd Light Horse Regiment parade at the Goodwood show grounds

Richard Allen Ockenden

On the morning of 25th April 1915, the British allies' boats landed on the foreign shores of Gallipoli. For most of the boys this was the furthest away from home that they had ever been. The men in these boats were met with the steep, rough cliffs of the cove and no sooner had they set foot on the strange soil when they were cut down by machine gun fire and had shells and mortars rain down on them like a monsoon. Only the lucky ones made it through this stage and as the days and weeks lengthened their spirit did



Richard Allen Ockenden-
Prepared to fight for his
King and country.

not wane. No one knew that it would soon be remembered as one of the most influential days that shaped the Australian nation. Richard Allen Ockenden was one of almost 35,000 South Australians and over 416,000 Australians to enlist in the First World War (Gravesecret, 2013). He and every other man who fought there are remembered as being some of the toughest, most courageous boys there were. The bravery, endurance, ingenuity, larrikinism and mateship these men displayed coined a new Australian term which has endured for one hundred years, known as the ANZAC spirit.

On the 19th May 1915 The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps became known by the acronym ANZAC. The word was initially used to refer to the cove where the Australian and New Zealand troops landed; soon after it was used to describe the qualities of the men and women who fought. Richard Ockenden risked his life for his King and countrymen. Returning physically impaired and mentally scarred, which he endured for the rest of his life, without regret.

The Gallipoli campaign began when the fighting on the Western Front had receded into a stalemate late in 1914. The British Government suggested that an attack on Germany's allies would be the best way to defeat them. A three-pronged landing was planned and intended to clear the Turkish troops on the straits. Australia's involvement at Gallipoli began on the 25th of April 1915 at dawn when the ANZACs landed north on Gaba Tepe while the British forces landed at Cape Helles on the Gallipoli Peninsula (see appendix 1). The purpose of these two landings was to take the Turkish forts commanding the straits. Ten days later Richard's battalion would arrive and be drawn into this bloody conflict. The third landing at Suvla Bay took place in August; overall it was deemed a military failure and resulted in the loss of over 8,500 Australian soldiers (Department of Defence, 2012).

Richard's upbringing undoubtedly played a big part in his willingness to enlist six months after the declaration of war. As a boy from the country Richard, like many other young naive boys, would have thought of the war as being a grand adventure. Richard was the eldest of ten children born to a farming family from Kooringa, a small township near Burra. Very much like the small town that I have grown up in where you rely on your imagination to keep you entertained. This ingenuity as a child would have helped Richard cope in the trenches of Gallipoli. Richard worked as a blacksmith and was an experienced horseman like his father, who was a drover (ABC News, 2014). Richard was the first of the Ockenden brothers to sign up – five more would follow – no doubt feeling that it was his moral and civic duty to play a role while supporting his mates and honouring his family name. These are all qualities that the ANZAC spirit embodies. By the time Richard enlisted both his parents had died of illness, never seeing their sons go off to war.

Now the head of the family, Richard's resilience became self evident. He was 19 at the time he enlisted and because he had experience with horses he was made a Private with the 3rd Light Horse Regiment. Richard would have been used to hard work; blacksmithing was no easy task. It would have instilled in him tenacity, endurance and commitment, all valuable skills needed in combat that the ANZAC spirit typifies. He embarked for Gallipoli on the 29th of January 1915 from Melbourne aboard the HMAT Mashobra. Soon he would be thrown into the horror of war when his ship reached ANZAC Cove on the 5th of May 1915. Within six weeks of arriving, the pitiable living conditions of the trenches struck Richard and he contracted influenza, malaria and gastroenteritis and was hospitalised on the 26th of June 1915 (see appendix 2).

Those six weeks of fighting would have seemed like a lifetime for Richard. The constant battle turned the Gallipoli peninsula into a sea of dead. Life in the trenches was indescribably arduous; poor sanitation, basic food and tremendously exhausting work every day, with little or no sleep (*ANZACs at Gallipoli*, 1997). The soldiers in Gallipoli were not called the "diggers" for nothing, having to dig their trenches into steep cliffs. Richard would have experienced all of this including the notion that at any moment his battalion may have to charge "over the top" armed with a bayonet attached to his rifle with little chance of survival. This would have taken immense courage and bravery to be prepared to run straight towards death and continue while the men around you were falling. His unit continued to be heavily attacked throughout May 1915. The British Commander of the Light Horse, Sir Harry Chauvel, on a trip to Quinn's Post was astounded by the cheerfulness of the South Australian and Tasmanian 3rd Light Horse Regiment of which Richard was a part. This exudes the ANZAC spirit, being able to maintain a sense of humour against all the odds. Chauvel knew that it took gut-wrenching courage just to be there (*the Australian Light Horse*, 2009)

When the men were wounded or had fallen ill at Gallipoli; as Richard had, they were shipped back to Egypt or spent time on the hospital boats moored in ANZAC cove which were horribly under staffed and lacked necessary medical supplies. They were often transported on the ships they arrived on which could be littered with horse manure. As antibiotics had not yet been invented many men died of infection after being operated on. The men who were deemed well enough were on the first ship back to their post; the fortitude and strength of character it took to go back into combat exemplifies the ANZAC spirit once again. In most cases it would have been to their death beds (Illawarra Mercury, 2013). On the 28th August 1915 after two months of convalescing Richard had to muster his courage and rejoin his unit at Quinn's Post.

Richard's return to his division was short lived as after two days he was shot in the neck and had his hand blown off. His arm was subsequently amputated below the elbow and he was transferred home. He arrived home to a hero's welcome on the 17th September 1915 along with several other young servicemen. I cannot imagine what this would have been like for Richard and all those other men. Arriving home to jovial music, people laughing, smiling and mingling when they had just left a place of death and misery.

Following Richard's return, his younger brother Harold was killed by a mortar strike whilst fighting on the Western Front in France, October 1917. After learning of his fate, another brother Oliver, who was also fighting abroad, wrote to his commanding officer with an emotional request to send his remaining brothers home due to family circumstances. Youngest siblings Nellie and Baden had been struggling to cope, Nellie suffered from a heart condition which was worsened by her melancholy due to her brothers' ongoing absence. Oliver's plea was answered and eventually the remaining Ockenden brothers were dismissed from the armed services (ABC News, 2014).



Ockenden brothers, back left to right - Charlie, Stanley, Baden. Front Left to Right - Frank, Arthur, Oliver, Richard.

All the Ockenden siblings suffered injuries of one kind or another and were irreversibly changed by their individual experiences of the war. Richard's oldest sister Dora never recovered from their brother's death and committed suicide in 1941 (ABC News, 2014).

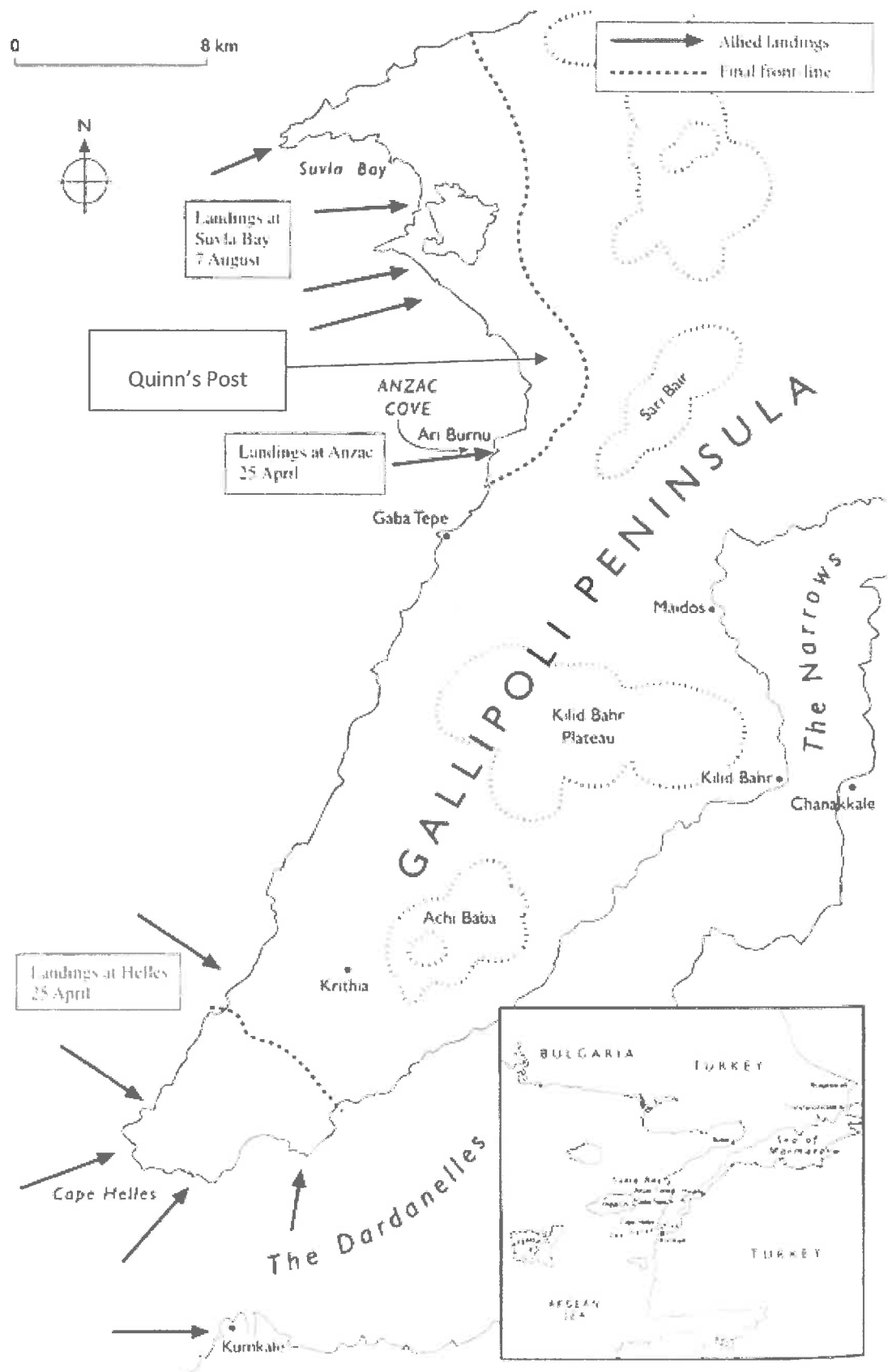
The Burra community and many other regional towns across Australia would remember the loss of so many of their young men for years to come.

The ANZAC spirit is a tradition that Australian and New Zealanders share. Richard and all the men who coped with the adversities of life in the trenches of Gallipoli showed true grit in times of hardship. They were courageous in the face of death on a daily basis in the trenches and rose to the occasion. It was not only the men who did their part for their country. Women and children back home donated goods to the war effort and came together to help support their men overseas; they carried on with the heavy work at home. It may have come from living in the harsh Australian conditions, having to deal with bushfires, floods and droughts but the men and women who went to Gallipoli had a great sense of community spirit that shone through adversity.

Remembering Richard and all the brave young men who went off to War through our ANZAC day services is important so we do not forget that for most they paid the ultimate sacrifice, which led to the freedom we so easily take for granted, but which we would be lost without. The ANZAC spirit lives on today in our towns, our schools and the sports fields we play on, the love we have for this sunburnt country is measured by our uniting together through hardship, while expressing humour and camaraderie.

Words: 1,572

Appendix 1: Map of Gallipoli Peninsula and Quinn's Post where Richard was stationed.



Appendix 2: A copy of Richard Ockenden's casualty form.

DUPLICATE Army Form B. 103.

Casualty Form - Active Service. A

Regiment or Corps 3rd Light Horse Regiment

Regimental No. 759 Rank Plt Name Ockenden R. A.

Enlisted (a) _____ Terms of Service (a) _____ Service reckons from (a) _____

Date of promotion () _____ Date of appointment () _____ Numerical position on () _____
 to present rank () to lance rank () roll of N.C.Os. ()

Extended _____ Re-engaged _____ Qualification (v) _____

Report		Kind of prostration, infection, wounds, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 21, or in other official documents. The authority on to which it was reported should be stated.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 21, or other official documents.
Date	From whom received				
		Proceeded to join U.M.F. Gallipoli 9.5.15			
21.6.15	11 th Coy 54 th Bala Co	Co Hospital Enab	Inonash Valley	23.6.15	Chronically List 1042 21/2/278 A.P.B. 213
26.6.15	4 th Field amb	Influenza	2	Head Quarters	23.6.15 C 2228 012/617
5.7.15	11 th Coy	Erysipelas	1st Gen. Hosp. H.M.C. Station	27.6.15	A 440 01/272
31.7.15	11 th Coy	Malaria	2	Camp Head- Quarters	30.7.15 C 2664 07/272
14.8.15	11 th Coy H.M.C. Station	Malaria	2	Head Quarters H.M.C. Station	7.8.15 C 2620 012/1150
28.8.15	3 rd Light Regt	Rejoined Regiment from	Head Quarters H.M.C. Station	28.8.15	A.P.B. 213. 012/1122
5.9.15	3 rd Light Regt Camp	Wounded	2	Hospital	20.8.15 A.P.B. 213. Chronically 11.9.15. List 1042 21/2/278
—	11 th Coy	Amputated Arm	11 th Coy Head Quarters	4.9.15	A 6898 012/1152
11.9.15	11 th Coy	Amputated Arm and S.S.12 lost	11 th Coy Head Quarters	5.9.15	C 2322 022/2125
9	11 th Coy	Amputated Arm	11 th Coy Head Quarters		

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