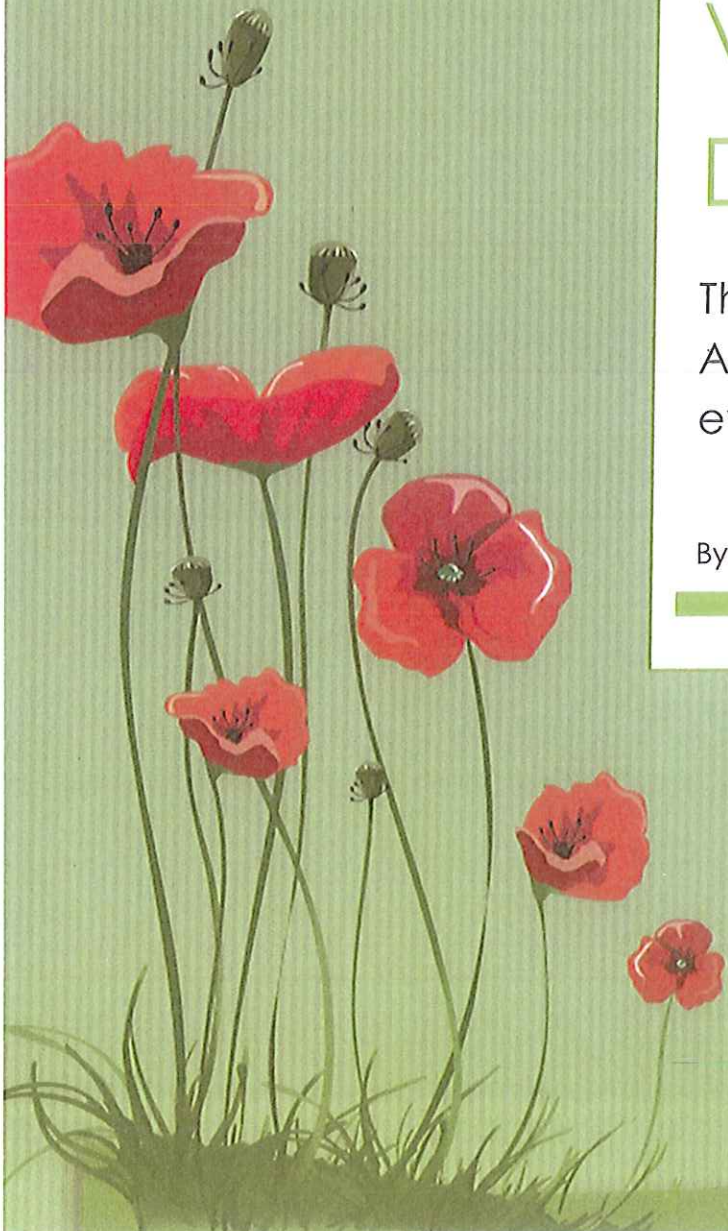




Leslie Varley Duxbury

The story of a brave
Anzac who gave
everything.

By Lucinda Duxbury



Leslie Varley Duxbury

93 years ago, 4 months after the First World War had come to an end, a parcel arrived at 11 Rose Terrace, Wayville- addressed to Lucy Kate Duxbury. In it a revolver, pack of cards, handkerchief, socks, watch and photo wallet - the salvaged possessions of her only son. The last remnants of a brave young Anzac who made the ultimate sacrifice for king and country.

Fast forward 70 years and we, the only Duxbury's in the Adelaide phonebook, received a letter from a man, asking if we were related to a digger named Leslie Varley Duxbury who was killed in action in France, 1918. The inquiry came from Roger Freeman¹ (footnote) who was researching a book that would become *Second to None – A Memorial History of the 32nd Battalion A.I.F. 1915-1919*, Duxbury's battalion. We looked into it at the time but found no family connections so thought no more of it – until now.

My Duxbury family branch comes from Victoria and although I have several Great Grandparents and Great Uncles who served at Gallipoli and on the Western Front they are not South Australian. But Leslie Duxbury was, so now after some research I am privileged to be able to tell the story of an all but forgotten fallen hero.

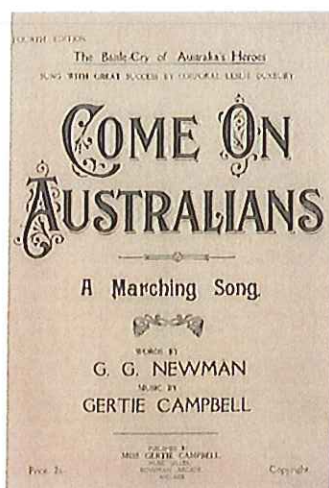
Leslie Varley Duxbury was born on the 3rd of January 1891 at 11 Rose Terrace, Wayville, South Australia to parents Lucy Kate Varley and William Duxbury². He was to be their only son.

As a boy he attended Parson's Public School and Caterer's College in Semaphore and after leaving school became a Sales Manager in Wayville. Leslie was an active and passionate contributor of Adelaide musical and sporting communities, his keen interest in sports apparent in his enjoyment of football, baseball and rowing, as well as his involvement in the South Park Bowling Club³. Leslie was a capable and excellent singer; music must have run in the blood as his younger sister, Violet Varley, later became a renowned Sydney opera singer.

When war broke out in 1914, Leslie's maternal Uncle, Thomas Varley was among the first to sign up, enlisting in the A.I.F. on the 17th May 1915.

Although Leslie was not amid these preliminary forces he was actively involved in "freely lending his services to patriotic singing concerts around Adelaide"⁴. He was the first to sing Miss Gertie Campbell's famous patriotic marching song, "Come on, Australians" and the sheet music boasts, "Sung with great success by Corporal Leslie Duxbury".

Miss Gertie Campbell was a popular pianist of the time who owned a music store in Bowman's Arcade, King William Street where she would sell her songs. Campbell is said to have often demonstrated popular pieces to a small crowd of customers. It is easy to imagine that at times Leslie would join her to inspire the gathered with an array of uplifting and patriotic tunes. And later discussing "The land of hope, the land of joy, The land of liberty," and other themes from the song.



The Battle-Cry of Australia's Heroes
 SUNG WITH GREAT SUCCESS BY CORPORAL LESLIE DUXBURY.

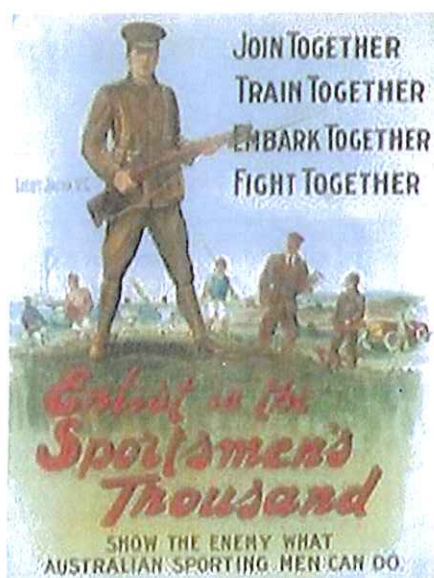
An extract of the sheet music of "Come on, Australians," a patriotic marching song that really reflects the Anzac spirit as well as highlighting the close link between sport and war with analogies. See lyrics, appendix 1.

Source: www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?c=2146

Meanwhile his Uncle, Thomas Varley, was in starkly contrasting conditions. He had landed on the other side of the world, on the shores of Gallipoli, to find himself in the midst of a raging war.

Upon their arrival, Varley's battalion were sent straight into action. He survived the initial attempt to take Hill 60 in which half of his battalion was lost to casualties. But then, on the 27th of August, barely a week after his arrival, Thomas Varley was killed in action as Australian and New Zealand forces renewed their attack on the Turks. The exact grave site of Thomas Varley is unknown but he is commemorated at the Lone Pine Memorial, along with the other 3,700 Anzacs with no known burial site.

Following the devastating death of his Uncle, Leslie Duxbury was now fully motivated to join the cause. In the September of 1915, at the young age 24 he enlisted in the A.I.F.



As the slogan, "Enlist in the Sportsmen's Thousand," on this enlistment poster shows, sport and war were closely linked. Sport and athleticism are now, I think, embedded deeply in the Anzac spirit.

Source: <http://www.warandidentity.com.au/A/DCCweb/history/ww1/homefront/homefront.html>

A South Australian recruitment poster, probably seen by Leslie Duxbury

Source: <http://www.firstworldwar.com/posters/australia.htm>



He embarked from South Australia on the 11th of April 1916 on-board HMAT A60 Aeneas as sergeant-major, 6th Reinforcements in the 32nd Battalion. He trained in Egypt for a short while before arriving in France in June 1916. A few weeks later and the 32nd battalion had their baptism of fire at the Battle of Fromelles, where soldiers poured over the trenches into an

oncoming hailstorm of bullets. This was one of the bloodiest battles in the whole war that saw 5,533 casualties in just 24 hours. I was unable to track Duxbury's actions during this battle.

CONFIDENTIAL REPORT

Page 1 of 1

Rank: P.S.M.

Name: Duxbury Leslie Victor

Regiment: 32nd B.A.B.

Date of report: 9th Nov 1917

By: [Signature]

For: [Signature]

Character of Person:

(a) General: [Signature]

(b) Particular: [Signature]

Standard of Education: Very good

Military Knowledge: Excellent

Power of Command and Leadership: First rate

Other Remarks: This cadet has done exceptionally well in everything and is the best Australian in the corp which in itself is a great feat - a very good leader indeed - and knows his job thoroughly. He has played the game all through and has been very keen - Will make a splendid officer.

Source: <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/script/s/Imagine.asp>

In October, 1917 Leslie was sent to the Officers' Training Battalion at Balliol College, Oxford.⁵ There he received an outstanding report that highlighted his great potential. His report card reads, "Standard of Education: Very good, Military Knowledge: Excellent, Power of Command and Leadership: First rate. This cadet has done exceptionally well in everything and is the best Australian in the corp which in itself is a great feat- a very good leader indeed- and knows his job thoroughly. He has played the game all through and has been very keen - Will make a splendid officer." Other sources also describe him as a most "zealous and capable officer".

Leslie Duxbury's outstanding report

Source: <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/script/s/Imagine.asp>

On May 1, 1918, he was appointed as a second lieutenant in the 32nd Battalion and was placed in charge of the 8th Platoon of B Company. Leslie was also appointed as the sports officer to the battalion, something in which he took "great interest"⁴

At the time of Leslie's appointment as 2nd lieutenant, the 32nd Battalion was serving in French trenches on the Western Front. Then in the late August and early September of 1918 the 32nd Battalion was involved in the fight for the French towns Mont St. Quentin and Péronne, a German stronghold. What followed was a fierce battle that claimed many casualties, 3000 men were lost in 3 days and amidst the fighting 7 Victoria Cross Medals were awarded to heroic Anzacs. The Germans began to speedily retreat and in less than two weeks the Australian forces had marched forward over 90 kilometres.



The Australian and French flags fly either side of a memorial at Mont St. Quentin that recognises the eternal gratefulness they hold to the Australian soldiers who saved their town.

Despite the military success of the action, it came at a cost. Australia suffered the loss of a fine young officer. For on the 3rd of September 1918, in the fields of France, Leslie Duxbury was hit in the thigh by a stray high explosive while taking some well-earned sleep. He was then transferred, unconscious, to the 5th Clearing Casualty Hospital, where he subsequently died on the 6th of September.



The now picturesque and peaceful Heath Cemetery, Harbonnières where once a relentless battle raged. It is located in the region of Somme, France. This is the final resting place of Leslie Duxbury, who is buried at plot IX: A. 17.

Source: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/>

Back home in Australia the news brought more grief and tragedy to Lucy Duxbury, Leslie's mother. She had already lost her brother at Gallipoli. Now she had lost her only son. And this was just after the passing of both her parents.

DUXBURY.—On the 16th September, at 5th Clearing Casualty Hospital, France, of gunshot wounds in thigh, 2nd Lieutenant Leslie Varley Duxbury, 82nd Battalion, darling only son of Lucy K. and William Duxbury, Rose-terrace, Wayville.

The Newspaper death notice of Leslie Varley Duxbury from 21st of September 1918. The date of death is wrong, but that was a common mistake made.

Source: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/87555964#pstart8611423>

The news of the loss of her beloved child far away in a distant country must have devastated and shattered her completely. But still, somehow, she kept on going, and after the tragic death of her husband in 1921 she moved to Waikerie, where she lived with her only daughter until her own death in 1937.



The monument to the dead in Péronne. It features a woman with an outstretched fist as she kneels next to a dead soldier.

Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f5/Peronne_1.JPG

The essence of a true Anzac spirit will always vary in meaning among individuals and I cannot tell you what the concept means to everyone. I can however provide my understanding of this great and highly regarded Australian and Kiwi value.

The Anzac spirit is a character trait that originated with the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps fighting in the First World War and was carried on with the different generations of servicemen and women throughout both nations' histories. The Anzac spirit still continues and is highly valued among the Services and within the community as a whole.

I think that the Anzac spirit is a set of values that you stick by through thick and thin until to very end. These values are of self-sacrifice – giving your all for the greater good. Loyalty - to your mates and your country. Endurance – sticking at it and keeping your head up through the toughest times. Courage – standing up to defend your values, country, friends and family. Integrity – always giving everyone a fair go and standing up for what's right.

Motivation – facing challenges with enthusiasm and keenness. Mateship – making good friends and sticking by them. And of course, deeply embedded in the Anzac spirit; good humour – not taking yourself or things too seriously and never losing your ability to laugh and have a good time, no matter what appalling conditions you were in. This ability to still have a good time was essential in getting the soldiers through the horrible reality of war.

Often singing and music was used for motivation and mateship. One popular song of the time was, "Come on, Australians" featuring cheeky sporting analogies such as, "And when we face the Kaiser's stumps, We'll bowl him for a "duck."

Sport, as well as being a way to keep fit, was also a way of having a bit of fun and muck around. Footy and tug-of-war were popular and battalions would often face off against each other in championships.

There is also one more thing that set the Anzacs apart from other forces; they weren't conscripted. They were volunteers, keen and willing to do their part for their country.



An Australian soldier in a trench with a Gramophone, listening to music

Source: <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/songs-of-war-patriotic>

Thanks to all the Australian servicemen and women, like Leslie Duxbury, who have proudly reflected the Anzac spirit in defending our country I am safe. I am free. I have rights. I am healthy and I am happy.

I believe that Leslie Duxbury was very much the image of the Anzac spirit. He, along with his comrades, was the flower of Australia's youth. He was a capable, enthusiastic and natural leader, and talented both musically and athletically... but he also had the courage to put that all on the line to ensure we, as Australians, had a free and fruitful future. His integrity saw him giving his services freely at patriotic concerts, raising money for the cause and then saw him sign up to give his all. He endured a war of catastrophic proportions but managed to still find fun in singing and his role of sports officer of his battalion. Finally Leslie paid the ultimate sacrifice, defending our nation. And for that I am eternally grateful.

Until I wrote this essay Leslie Duxbury was all but forgotten, the last of his line. It seems so cruel for the life of this young man who had so much more to offer to be taken when victory was so near. It is a small comfort, at least, to think that now he has not been forgotten and I feel honoured and privileged to be able to tell his incredible story.

I hope that someday, perhaps, someone will place a poppy on his grave saying "Thanks, Mate. Rest In Peace." And we will remember them.

ENDNOTES

¹ Roger has recently received an Order of Australia for his work in researching war history.



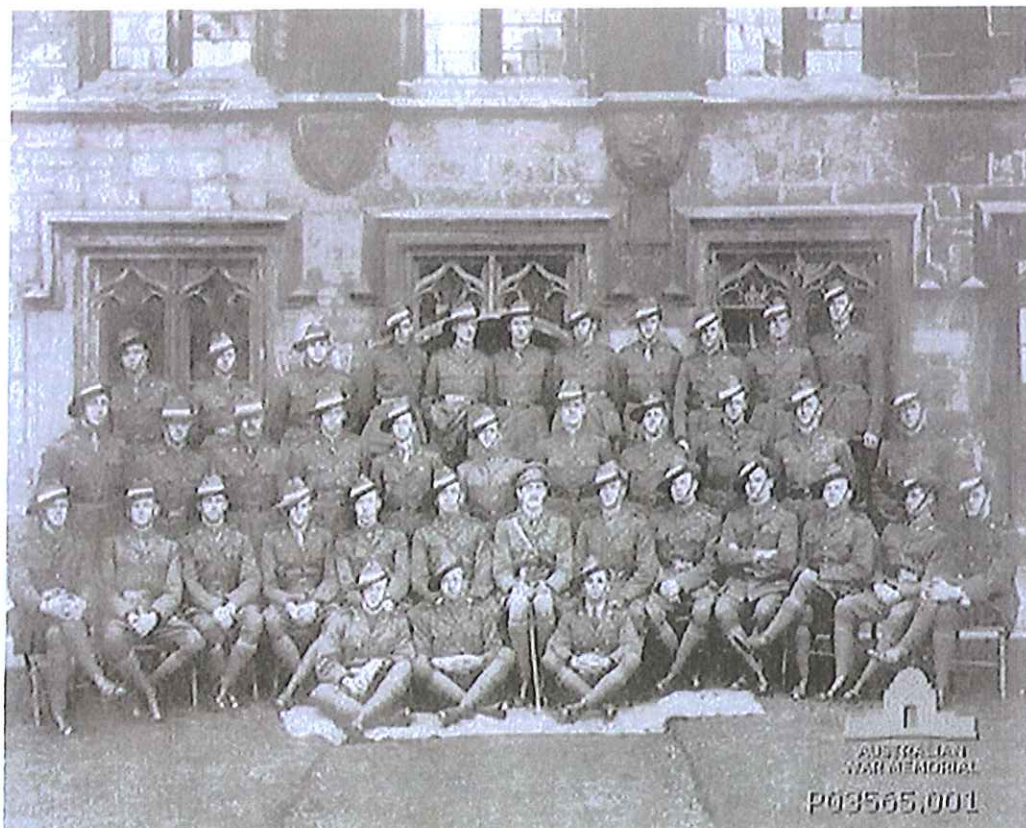
²A Photograph of Leslie's Parents- Lucy and William Duxbury



³A memorial plaque at the South Park Bowling Club, where his sacrifice to his country is acknowledged by a small memorial plaque at the original grounds of the club

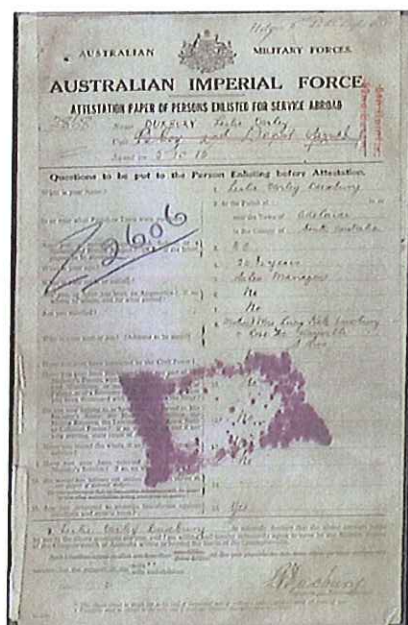
⁴As quoted by his mother in the AIF project records:
<http://www.aif.adfa.edu.au/showPerson?pid=86734>

⁵ Group portrait of Australian Contingent No 6 Officer Cadet Battalion, Balliol College, Oxford, February 1918, his report states that he was the finest cadet of the lot. Source: <http://www.awm.gov.au/>



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 *All websites last accessed on the 20/09/2012



Leslie Duxbury's enlistment paper

Source: recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp

APPENDIX 1

Come on, Australians

Along the heights of Turkey's shore
Our battle-cry was hurled;
Its echoes rang and rang again
Around the whole wide world;
On hist'ry's scroll we wrote our names
Upon Gallipoli;
That valiant charge, those cheering words
Will never, never die.

Chorus:

"Come on Australians!"
"We're the boys to fight!"
"Come on Australians!"
We're fighting for the right!
"Come on Australians!"
Shout with all your might!"
"Come on Australians!"

In ev'ry king of art and sport
Australia leads the way;
We taught the Turkeys how to trot
As long as they would stay;
There'll be no "foul" proceeding when
The "goose" steps one for luck,
And when we face the Kaiser's stumps
We'll bowl him for a "duck."

Australia then will take her place
Among the nations free,
The land of hope, the land of joy,
The land of liberty;
We soon shall hear the welcome sound ---
The cry of victory,
But till that day let come what may,
We'll shout on land and sea. ---

APPENDIX 2

CD #1

Come on Australians, as played with great success by Corporal Leslie Duxbury

Played by Ms Lucinda Duxbury, Adelaide, Friday 21st September 2012

WAV File (1 minute 28 seconds)

