



PREMIER'S ANZAC SPIRIT

SCHOOL PRIZE

2010



Harold William Humphries

By Chloe Searles



*Using the story of a fallen South Australian World War 1 serviceman/woman
on the Western Front, describe what the ANZAC Spirit means to you.*

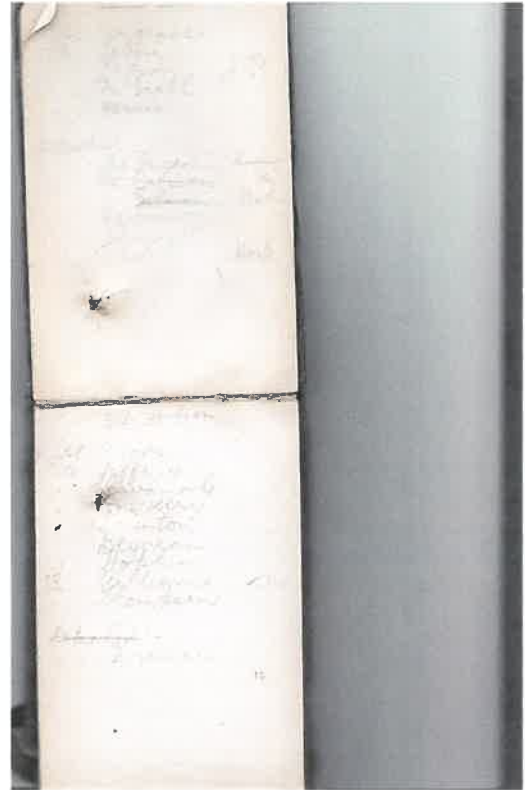
He died as he lived, brave and fearless, a true Australian hero

As a little girl I had heard stories about my Grandfather's Uncle. Harold William Humphries. The story was about a bullet hole in a diary.

The bullet hole occurred on the fifth November 1916 when Harold was killed by a sniper at the Battle of Flers in France. Ninety three years later I have had the honour of holding this diary and sharing it with my classmates. Harold had photos and a diary in his top pocket when he was killed.

This diary had a significant impact on me. Holding something that has a bullet hole which killed a person, is considerably overwhelming. My classmates felt the same, each and every one of them felt privileged to hold such a historic piece of the war. Harold went to war as a young man only a few years older than I am now. If I were in his shoes I would have been very scared, so I see my Great Great Uncle as an incredibly brave person. His life was cut short by a sniper's bullet but here he is still being remembered 93 years later.

ANZAC spirit is something my Great Great Uncle showed a lot of. ANZAC spirit to me means what a true Australian is, and what Australians have shown since Australia was first founded. Mateship, bravery and larrikinism are great qualities of an Australian. Every single Aussie soldier in the war showed one or more of these qualities in some way or another. Whether they stuck up for mates, had a great sense of humour including the ability to laugh at themselves, or showed a selfless act of courage.



Harold William Humphries a young clerk of 18 from Adelaide enlisted for war in January 1915. Harold was born in Wallaroo and attended Prince Alfred College in Adelaide. He was the oldest child of six. We can only assume why Harold went to war, but most young men answered the call from their King and country to enlist. Most felt it was their duty and responsibility. Often men put up their age so that they could go. I believe he went to war for adventure, for experience, for fun. But that is not what he got. My Great Great Uncle, and every other Australian man who enlisted, signed up to travel and to be with mates, but what they got was "The Great War." The Great War was fought between two sides, The Triple Entente and The Triple Alliance. The Triple Alliance consisted of Italy, Germany and Hungary/Turkey. The Triple Entente was made up of Russia, France and England which included

Australia. Australia fought with the Triple Entente, as their friends, and helped each other in times of need. They would stick together no matter what; they were on the same team and fought together right till the end. This is what ANZAC Spirit is. Mateship in its purest form.

To go to war at 18 takes someone very brave. To be willing to fight for Australia in a foreign country shows great pride in your nation, and a willingness to help out, especially when it may involve dying. My Great Great Uncle would have gone to France because his mates were and because he would not have wanted an enemy country taking over his homeland. Australia was his home, and he would not let anything happen to it. He would have also gone because it was something everyone expected you to do as a young, fit, able-bodied person. Harold showed great courage and bravery to choose to go to war at such a young age, the ANZAC spirit that he displayed was immense and truly Australian.

Mateship is the quality shown in soldiers of friendship and equality. Great mates would always stick together no matter what peril or trauma they are being faced with. Mateship is also what made most people enlist for war. Men wanted to travel and see the world with their friends, not with people they didn't know. Harold would have thought of everyone as an equal, all the men in the trenches were there for the same reason; they were there to fight for the safety of their country and the security of their family.

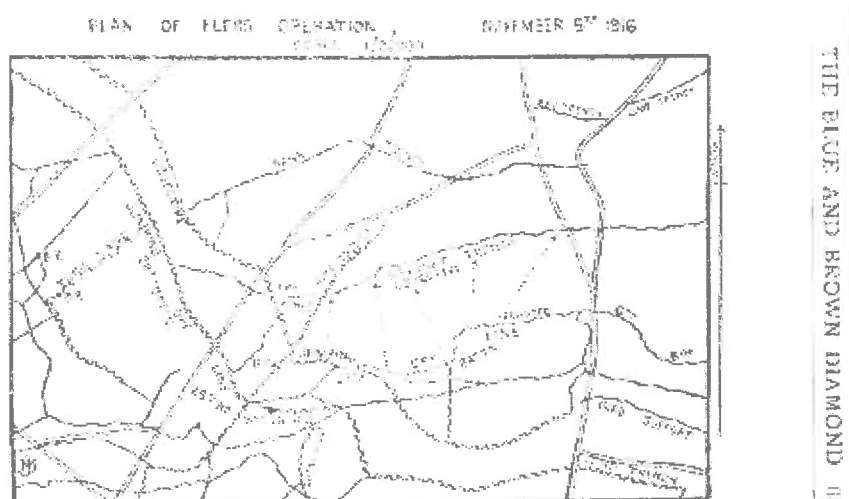
Harold joined the 27th Battalion that was made up entirely of South Australian men and women. In his wallet he carried a piece of material with a pattern of brown and blue diamonds. This was the symbol and colour of their Battalion. It was called the Blue and Brown Diamond. Harold's battalion was like his family in the war, they did absolutely everything together. The men in his battalion, being traditional Aussies, played football when they could. It relieved the stress and tension which built while endlessly waiting. Once you were part of the war machine, you went where they told you. Harold and his battalion were sent to The Somme and they were there during the winter; they fought in the toughest of conditions and endured the harshest weather. Men drowned in the deep, thick mud pooling at the bottom of the trenches. It was so cold that a boiling cup of tea froze within seconds. For the men who survived the trials of the Somme winter, it was not easily forgotten.



In April 1916, Harold was in charge of watching the prisoners in his battalion who were in detention for some misdemeanor. He and two other men were playing cards to pass the time and according to a court martial I found in my

research a prisoner escaped, possibly through a hole in the fence. It said in the court martial that none of the three men had any idea how the prisoner escaped, but I have a sneaky feeling that Harold my Great Great Uncle had something to do with his escape. Harold was a bit of a larrikin and he would have been looking for adventure anywhere he could find it. He probably let the prisoner go so that he could get a bit of enjoyment out of the day to day seriousness of the war. He was looking to play a prank, not to seek trouble or cause distress to his superiors. This is what I believe to be larrikinism and shows ANZAC Spirit by being what people believe a true Australian is. In my life I am always trying to have a bit of fun and get away from the stress and routine of school life. That is what weekends are for!

During my research I discovered that Harold had contracted VD and he forfeited his pay for twenty days. It worried me to have knowledge of this private information and I realized that for a young man with the horror of war all around him, why wouldn't he be trying to forget for a short time? It is not up to me or anyone else to judge this man who gave his life.



PLAN OF THE FLERS OPERATION – the battle in which Harold died.

On 5th November 1916, in mid- morning, the 27th Battalion made an attack near Flers. This attack was made in some of the worst conditions the Australians ever saw on the western front, and for Harold it was the full stop of his life. The dismal conditions of The Somme winter, were the last things he saw. This was the day, that dreaded bullet from an enemy sniper shot down my Great Great Uncle, and the bullet hole was made in the diary. Harold gave his life for his country and for his King. I think that is the greatest gift anyone could give.

The diary that my uncle kept in his top pocket contained his day to day activities, and in particular the day of the battle in which he was killed. In it were written names of people he was in charge of, and what duties they needed to perform. It also had written what supplies were needed (shovels, gas masks, lanterns, spare helmets and protection, ammunition and weaponry) and the schedule for the day, including night watches in the trenches, rest periods and meal times. This was the last thing he wrote. It may seem mundane and ordinary but this was their life.

Harold's mother asked the question, "Can you tell me where my son is buried?" In 2009 I know that he is with he mates in an unknown field in France. He is remembered with honour at the memorial of Villers Brettoneux.

My family were all aware of Harold's involvement in the war, but none of them had the time to research the facts and really get to know what happened. The results of this essay brought my family together to find out what happened back then, people made the effort to find out and get information to me so I could do as best a job as I could on this essay. The only question now is what to do with the diary? Do we take it to Canberra to be displayed in the National War Memorial or do we give it to the 27th Battalion in Adelaide?

Harold died as a young man of twenty and the spirit of the ANZAC lives through me knowing his story. I will not forget him.

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I also received information from family members, especially my Grandmother, Margaret Kimber.

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