

# The Premiers ANZAC Spirit School Prize 2019



Image of David Spry, Property of David Harding

**David Spry**

Service number: 2449

Unit: 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Reinforcement

Home town: Denial Bay, Far West Coast, SA

## FRONT AND BACK

My great, great grandfather, David Spry, was a 22-year-old farmer from Denial Bay on the West Coast of South Australia. He voluntarily enlisted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1915 to fight in WWI (Virtual War Memorial Australia, 2019) influenced by the government's propaganda asking for more young soldiers.



*Ruby Bleeze, Property of David Harding*

According to Spry (1915). As part of South Australia's 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, David was sent to Tell El Kebir, to train for the Siege of Gallipoli. After the soldiers withdrew from Egypt, they sailed to England before joining the Western Front. David was injured several times but returned to his Battalion to fight alongside his mates, until the war ended in 1918 (Virtual War Memorial Australia 1915). With a positive perspective on life, David survived the war, returned to his beloved Ruby and settled back into coastal life at Denial Bay.

## SAND AND SIBLINGS

David Spry was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1893 in Edithburgh, the second youngest of 11 children. Finishing school, he and his brothers moved to Denial Bay to grow wheat. His life was physically demanding, working in a harsh dry climate, but those 10 years, unknowingly prepared him for the strength he would need to survive the horrors he would soon face.

David, a strong 6-foot, dark haired man, was the first of his three brothers to voluntarily enlist in World War 1. Due to severe drought conditions he possibly enlisted for money rather than adventure.



*Young David Spry, Property of David Harding*

## FROM PYRAMIDS TO POZIÈRES

David boarded the 'Kanowna' (Bert Lovell Lock, C, 1914-19) on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1915, as part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion sailing for Egypt. Arriving at Tell El Kebir on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, he replaced exhausted soldiers at Gallipoli who had become skeletons, hypervigilant, exhausted and starving, making them a shadow of the men they used to be (Kearney. R, 2005). They knew the war was beyond the high cliffs, focussing only on surviving each day. Due to unsanitary conditions, David was sent to hospital with dysentery.



*HMAT A61 'Kanowna', source (wikiwand, 2019)*

During the early hours of late December 1915, the ANZAC's silently withdrew from Gallipoli to reinforce the British army in France (Davidson. L, 2010).

Arriving at Marseilles on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1916, he prepared for battle training as a *Lewis Gunner*. Under Australian command the retrained and experienced soldiers were well-behaved and resourceful. Having the Bible Ruby gave him in his breast pocket gave him faith to return home.

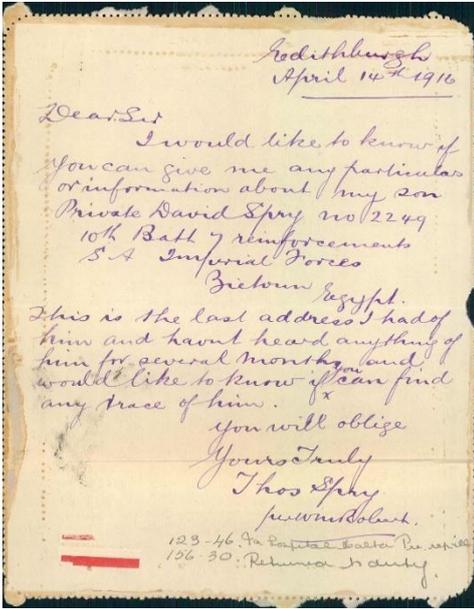


Figure 1: Archival letter, written by Thomas Spry, (South Australian Red Cross Information Bureau, 2019).

25<sup>th</sup>, 1916, Germans were advancing over the ridge, causing David, one of the five Lewis Machine Gunner and 50 rifles to open fire (Bert Lovell Lock, 1914-19). David wrote about the ringing of death from the incoming shells, *'...but alas they will never get me'* (Figure 2)

Trenches protected with high sandbags were filled with ankle-deep mud, flies and rodents. The cold of the upcoming months was a cruel experience for the Australian soldiers. The welcome



Pozières, Source: (Australian Government Department of Veteran's affair, 2019)

Thomas Spry, David's father, concerned he had not heard from David since Egypt, contacted the Australian Red Cross Society for information (Figure 1). Thomas received a reply explaining David was in hospital (South Australian Red Cross Information Bureau, 2019).

After replacing another Battalion, Pozières reeked of death and sadness, suffering 23,000 casualties (Australian War Memorial, 2019). A landscape of mud, bodies, dead horses, curled spiny barbed wire, and large metal machines (Australian War Memorial, 2019). The constant bombs, gunfire and gas attacks made them all feel anxious.

A soldier called out into the trenches at 9 o'clock on July

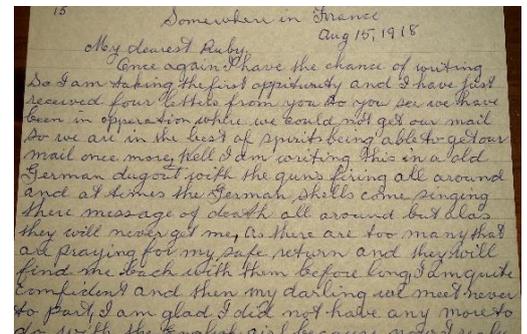
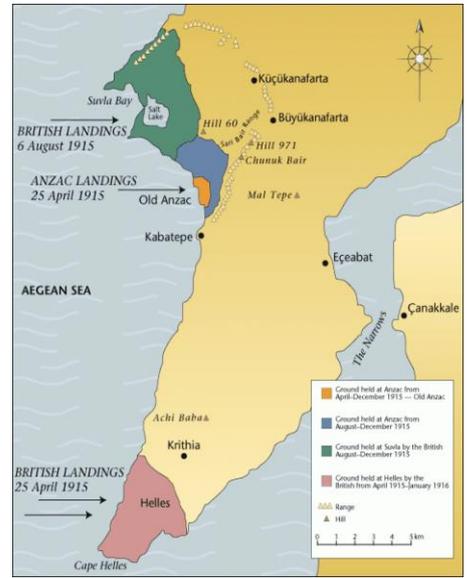


Figure 2: Transcript written by David Spry, Property of David Harding

packages from home were relief for the hungry, cold soldiers over the few years they spent fighting (The Great war, 2019).



Map of the Gallipoli Landing, (Australian Government Department of Veteran's affair, 2019)

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1916, shell fire caused 120 soldiers to be injured. David's ankle was badly injured from nearby explosions. Spared from death he was sent to hospital in England for surgery to remove shrapnel from his legs and torso. In his heart-felt letters to Ruby he explains that he met Australian nurses and felt like he was at home but after 5 months he was getting bored sewing cushion covers. (Figure 3) (Spry, 1918).

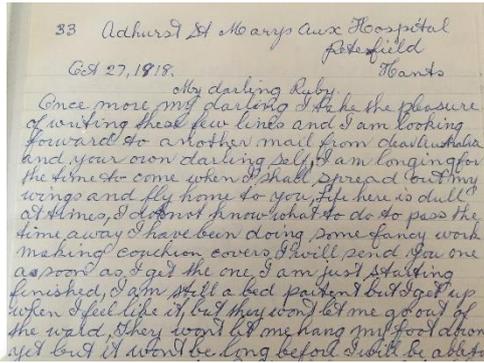


Figure 3: Transcript written by David Spry, Property of David Harding

David never returned to the fighting because he was recovering in hospital when the Armistice was declared (Bert Lovell Lock, 1914-19). Relieved, he longed to return home (Spry, 1919). The 'Fighting' 10<sup>th</sup> saw the first and the last battle and over 1000 men from this Battalion gave their lives for



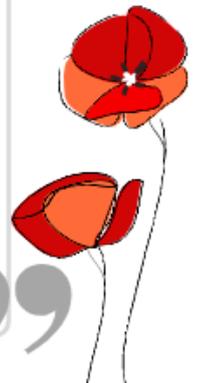
First ANZAC Day at Pozieres, Source: 'A pictorial of Australians at war, Paul Hamlyn

The Empire. David sailed on the 'Dunluce Castle', arriving back to South Australia on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1919 (Page, 2019).



As poppies fill the bloom  
and the keeper tends the graves  
Names are etched in stone in memory of the brave  
They answered the call  
Of age some chose to lie  
But no matter the age  
they were all too young to die

From the song 'Stand', 2015, written by Gennaro Mannella, Singer/Songwriter and Deputy Principal of St Brigid's Catholic School



## RETURNING TO RUBY



David Spry, Ruby Bleeze wedding, Property of David Harding

David married Ruby Bleeze, moving to a farm in Denial Bay and lived there for 19 years. Ruby gave birth to a daughter Daphne. In 1938 they sold the farm and moved to Adelaide where David worked for a seed mill and Ruby as a nurse.

One year later, David voluntarily enlisted during World War 2 in the 4<sup>th</sup> Garrison Battalion serving in Alice Springs as a Lance Sergeant guarding the communication lines for Australia. Returning home on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1942 they settled in Ceduna.

He worked as a farmer and Ruby worked for the local hospital (Harding, D. 2019). Daphne married, Edwin Harding who had just returned from the Siege of Tobruk as part of B company 2/48<sup>th</sup> Battalion.



Image of Ruby, David, Daphne Spry, Property of David Harding

from the Siege of Tobruk as part of B company 2/48<sup>th</sup> Battalion.



Alice Springs communication guard, Property of David Harding

Daphne gave birth to David Harding (my grandfather). David Harding was 20 years old when conscripted to Vietnam as a part of 5 RAR. David Spry prayed for his grandson's safe return and comforted Daphne when Edwin was hit and killed by a drunk driver (Figure 4)

David Spry welcomed his Grandson's return from Vietnam but said goodbye to his wife as she passed away 2 days later.

(Harding, D. 2019)

On 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1970 David Spry, 76, was found accidentally drowned in a water tank and is buried in the Ceduna cemetery (The District Council of Ceduna, 2019).

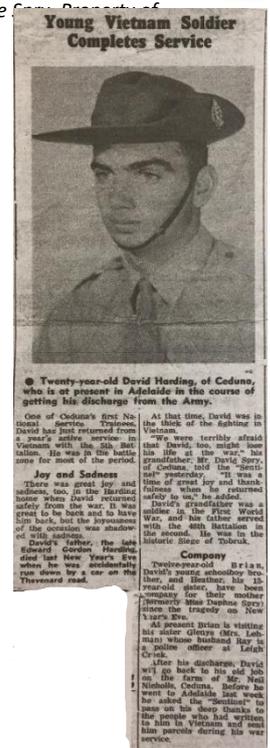


Figure 4: Image of David Harding Source: (West Coast Sentinel, 1967)

Reference list:

Advertiser, 2015, *The story of Gallipoli*, Accessed 3/2/19

Australian Aviation Heritage centre, 1992, DVD, *The Battle of Australia*. [Viewed 23 Jan 2019]

Australian Government department of veteran's affair, 2019, *strategic maps of Gallipoli*. [online] Available at: <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/history/conflicts/gallipoli-and-anzacs/resources/strategic-maps-gallipoli> [Accessed 6 Apr. 19]

<sup>1</sup>Australian Government Department of Veteran's affair, 2019, *Australians on the Western front*, [online] <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/history/conflicts/australians-western-front-19141918/australian-remembrance-trail/first-australian-3> [Accessed 6 Apr. 19]

Australian war Memorial, (2019). *10th Australian Infantry Battalion*. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51450/> [Accessed 22 Jan. 2019].

Australian War Memorial (2019). *First World War 1914–18 | The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2019].

Bert Lovell Lock. C, published 1914-19, *the fighting 10th*, Imperial war Museum, accessed 9/2/19

Page, B, 2019, <http://gawlerworldwar1.weebly.com>, world war 1 honour role, Accessed 24/02/2019

Page, B, 2019, interview, personal communication

Davidson. L, published 2010, *Zero Hour*, accessed 25/2/19

Hamlyn. P, published 1970-73, *A pictorial history of Australians at war*, accessed 24/2/19

Harding, D. 2019, interview, personal communication.

Kearney. R, published 2005, *Silent voices*, accessed 24/2/19

Film Australia, directed by Rudd, P. Ulm, B., 2004, DVD, *Colour of War the ANZACS*, [Viewed 22 Jan 2019]

Mannella, G, 2015, song, St Brigids catholic school

South Australian Red Cross Information Bureau, (2019). *David Spry | South Australian Red Cross Information Bureau*. Available at: <https://sarcib.wv1.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/soldier/david-spry> [Accessed 30 Mar. 2019].

<sup>1</sup>South Australian Red Cross Information Bureau, 2019). *Packet content | South Australian Red Cross Information Bureau*. [online] Available at: [https://sarcib.wv1.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/packet-content/51385#https://sarcib.wv1.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/packet\\_images/0184/SRG76\\_1\\_0184\\_5.jpg](https://sarcib.wv1.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/packet-content/51385#https://sarcib.wv1.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/packet_images/0184/SRG76_1_0184_5.jpg) [Accessed 31 Mar. 2019].

Spry, D, 1916, letters, personal communication

Spry, D. 1918, Letters, personal communication.

Spry, D. 1919, Letters, personal communication.

Spry, D. 1919, Letters, personal communication.

The District Council of Ceduna, (2019). *Spry, David*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ceduna.sa.gov.au/page.aspx?c=1137> [Accessed 31 Mar. 2019].

The Great War, (2019). *Trench Warfare in World War 1 | THE GREAT WAR Special*, YouTube, [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P92guhd7d-8> [Accessed 22 Jan. 2019].

Virtual war memorial Australia (2019). David SPRY. Available at: <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/269520> [Accessed 22 Jan. 2019].

Wikiwand. (2019). *TSS Kanowna*. [online] Available at: [http://www.wikiwand.com/en/TSS\\_Kanowna](http://www.wikiwand.com/en/TSS_Kanowna) [Accessed 5 Feb. 2019].