

Josh Loxton
Loxton High School
Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize 2017

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"Using a range of sources research the experience of a South Australian service man or woman on the Western Front and/or in the Middle East during World War 1."

Private James Oliver Cass



September 12th 1890 - September 7th 1918

By Josh Loxton

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James Oliver Cass



The ANZAC spirit is a characteristic which embodies Australian culture and is what created the foundation of the nation's identity. It is the qualities such as mateship, bravery, optimism, and a great sense of humour which create what is now known as the ANZAC spirit. While the ANZAC Spirit may have been born along the Gallipoli Peninsula on the 25th April 1915, it was also prominent in the brave men who fought and died along the dreaded Western Front. My great-great uncle, James Oliver Cass, had symbolised what is known today as the ANZAC spirit during the time he served for both his, motherland Britain and Australia.

James Joseph and Annie Louisa Cass gave birth to their third child on 12th September 1890 unaware of what his future would hold. James Oliver Cass, known as Oliver, was born in the village of Whixley in Yorkshire, England where he and his family lived for the following twenty-three years. Oliver received his education at the Archbishop Holgates School in York, near Whixley. According to an anthropology report written about Oliver as of June 1900, it had stated that he was known as a quiet and reserved child yet also a reasonably bright student. He acquired a great sense of humour similar to his siblings, a quality which is shown in his letters he sent back home. His great sense of humour is an accurate example of the ANZAC spirit. His anthropology report had also indicated that careers suited to him include: an engineer, architect, and a solicitor. When he had finished his schooling, he pursued his passion for engineering and completed an apprenticeship in engineering at Leeds. After he had completed his apprenticeship, in 1912 he traveled to Chile where he worked for a steam engine company for a short period of time before travelling back to England.

James and Annie with their one daughter and five sons embarked to Australia in mid-1914 so that their sons would be given the opportunity to farm with the extra land in Pyap West. Their emigration to Australia demonstrates the optimism and the ambitious qualities within the Cass family as they embraced new opportunities. These qualities are also ones which are strongly associated with the ANZAC spirit. He and his family arrived at section 235, Pyap West on the 6th June 1914. At Pyap West, the Cass family would establish their farming enterprise which still runs today and remains family owned by their descendants. Unbeknown to

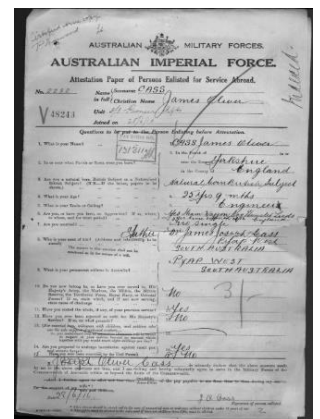


Image of the stones left behind by Oliver

them, living on the farm created conditions which would prepare Oliver and his brothers for war. It prepared him physically, due to the practical nature of working on a farm. Oliver had begun creating a stockpile of stones on the farm from which he would construct his house where he and his fiancé, Carrie Kirby, would live once he got back from the war. Oliver mentioned in a letter to his Mother on November 25th 1917, "It would be lovely if Carrie & I were settled down on the plain, but we can't arrange that until peace is declared." Today, his stones remain at Pyap West and have remained in their exact location as they were when he had left to fight for

his country in the Great War.

Oliver was the second sibling to enlist in the AIF following his eldest brother, Boucher, who enlisted in late 1914 which he joined the 3rd Lighthorse Regiment. Oliver joined the AIF on the 28th June 1916 at the age of 25. His enlistment can be partly contributed to his devotion and loyalty to both Britain and Australia. This commitment to his country is an instance where Oliver demonstrated the ANZAC spirit quality of patriotism. He enlisted as an engineer and was allocated in the 3rd Pioneer Battalion as the 3rd reinforcement. Oliver's enlistment in the war brought dignity to the Cass family however it also left his parents and siblings worried and anxious for his life. The Great War was a frightening time for not only the soldiers on the battlefield, but the families back at home dreading to hear the news that a loved one had passed away. Three months later, Oliver embarked the HMAT Karroo at Melbourne on the 18th September 1916 on which he was aboard for two months until he arrived at Plymouth on the 15th November 1916. He stayed in England for the following four months until the 28th February 1917 when he was transported to France. Once he had arrived in France, he was positioned along the France-Belgium border where he would



Oliver's AIF enlistment form

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participate in general maintenance, construction, and upkeep of the trenches and weaponry. On June 6th, whilst preparing for the Battle of Messines, Oliver was wounded by a piece of shrapnel which had hit his left leg. Due to his injuries that he had received, he remained out of action for the following six months where he recovered at Lewisham Hospital, England. It was nearing Christmas time when he had almost completely recovered from his wounds and fit for service, when on the 19th December 1917, he was sent back out to fight along the dreadful Western Front.

Once Oliver had arrived in France, he performed general maintenance amongst the trenches and assisted in the repairing of a railway track. He was not involved in much action from then on until in June, 1918 when he was transported to Villers-Bretonneux where he fought with his brothers, Bouchier and John. After the First and Second Battles of Villers-Bretonneux, he left the area in order to prepare for the Battle of Amiens. It was on the 8th August 1918, when the Germans were caught off guard by this surprise offensive by the Australian and Canadian divisions. The Australians had accomplished all of their objectives within two hours of fighting. Engineer, Harold Grant had written "Great news ... Australians caught Fritz napping" when he heard what had happened during the advance at the Battle of Amiens. It was a great example of what the Australians could accomplish due to their ANZAC spirit nature. At the end of the campaign, Oliver would help in the repairing of the Chipilly bridge which is one of many bridges which the Germans had destroyed while retreating. It was the 3rd Pioneer Battalion whom were given the task of fixing the Chipilly Bridge which they accomplished in just under seven days. This is yet another instance of where the ANZAC spirit can achieve great things in a short period of time due to their dedication and persistence.



*Remains of Villers-Bretonneux, 1918.
Source: Australian War Memorial*

It was not long before Oliver was involved in his last battle, the Battle of Mont St Quentin, on the 31st August 1918. The battle resulted in countless Germans retreating and surrendering to the Allies and a swift occupation of both Mont St Quentin and Péronne. His older brother, Bouchier, took part in this battle as well when sadly



*'Battle of Mont St Quentin', 1918.
Source: Australian War Memorial*

on the 2nd September 1918 he was killed in action when a shell had exploded whilst he was stretcher bearing an injured German officer. This loss brought overwhelming grief to the Cass family back in Pyap West. Just three days after the loss of Bouchier, on the 5th September 1918, Oliver was tragically sprayed by German machine gunfire and taken to the dressing station immediately by two stretcher bearers from his company. He was severely wounded while he was advancing towards the Buire Wood outpost near Tincourt. After two days of intense suffering, he sadly passed away on the 7th September 1918. This had created unbearable conditions for his family as they

had lost two of their sons within less than a week. John Cass, the third son who had enlisted in 1917 in the 21st Machine Gun Company, told the heartbreaking and tragic story to his children of when he had gone to let Oliver know that Bouchier had been killed. As John arrived at the hospital, it was too late as he was given the devastating news that his second brother Oliver had also just passed away.

Oliver, who is my great-great uncle, had brought pride to his family when he fought in the war, yet much grief when he passed away. He had repeatedly demonstrated the ANZAC spirit throughout his time he served during the Great War. He epitomised the ANZAC spirit in every quality and characteristic which defines it. He showed persistence and loyalty to his country when he was wounded and then regained the strength to fight for his country again. He had shown bravery when he was forced to climb out of his trench and charged at the enemy into machine gunfire. He had dreams of coming back home to build his house at Pyap West where he could live with his fiancé, Carrie, that were crushed by the realities of war. He was an aspiring engineer and farmer, which was all lost forever on the 7th September 1918, when he passed away at the young age of just 27.

Word Count: 1491

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Appendix



Fig 1. Photograph of Oliver whilst studying at Leeds.

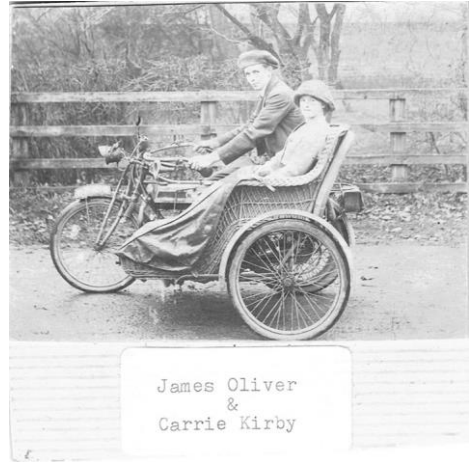


Fig 2. Photograph of Oliver and Carrie, his fiancé.



Fig 3. Photograph of Oliver whilst enlisted in the AIF.



Fig 4. Possibly Oliver, whilst repairing Chipilly Bridge.

A black and white image of an Australian Imperial Force (AIF) enlistment form. The form is titled 'AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE. Attention Paper of Persons Eligible for Service Abroad.' It contains various fields for personal information, including name, date of birth, and address. The form is filled out with handwritten text in blue ink. The name 'James Oliver' is written in several places. The form also includes a section for 'Conditions to be fulfilled before Enlistment' and a section for 'Remarks'. The form is signed by 'James Oliver' and 'James Oliver'.

Fig 6. AIF enlistment form.

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Cass

Army Form B 103. Casualty Form - Active Service.
 PAGE 1
 Regional Number 2015
 Christian Name: JAMES CLAYER
 Surname: CLAYER
 Age on Enlistment: 25 years 09 months
 Date of appointment to present rank: 25.12.17
 Occupation: ...
 Signature of Officer in Charge: ...

Date	Place where received	Part of body affected	Place of Casualty	Place of Hospital	Remarks
1917
...
...

Fig 7. AIF Casualty form – Active Service 1/2.

Army Form B 103. Casualty Form - Active Service.
 PAGE 2
 Date: 9 JUN 1917
 Place where received: ...
 Part of body affected: ...
 Place of Casualty: ...
 Place of Hospital: ...
 Remarks: ...

Date	Place where received	Part of body affected	Place of Casualty	Place of Hospital	Remarks
9 JUN 1917
...
...

Fig 8. AIF Casualty form – Active Service 2/4.

Army Form B 103. Casualty Form - Active Service.
 PAGE 3
 Regional Number 2015
 Christian Name: James Clayer
 Surname: CLAYER
 Age on Enlistment: 25 years 09 months
 Date of appointment to present rank: 25.12.17
 Occupation: ...
 Signature of Officer: ...

Date	Place where received	Part of body affected	Place of Casualty	Place of Hospital	Remarks
...
...
...

Fig 9. AIF Casualty form – Active Service 3/4.

Army Form B 103. Casualty Form - Active Service.
 PAGE 4
 Date: 27 SEP 1918
 Place where received: ...
 Part of body affected: ...
 Place of Casualty: ...
 Place of Hospital: ...
 Remarks: ...

Date	Place where received	Part of body affected	Place of Casualty	Place of Hospital	Remarks
27 SEP 1918
...
...

Fig 10. AIF Casualty form – Active Service 4/4.