



Vernon Hocking

1886-1972

Written by Laura Stephens



Photo of Vernon given to his Mother on her Birthday from Harold Hocking

I would like to introduce you to my neighbour's grandfather, Vernon Hocking. He lived a normal life, growing up in Semaphore then many years later moving to Sandy Creek, near Gawler, with his wife and 3 children. When the time of the war came, Vernon, like so many other ordinary men and women, enlisted to fight for their beloved country and to protect not only their family, but their mates' families.

Vernon Hocking was born on the 11th November (later this date would be known as Remembrance Day) 1886 in Parkside, South Australia. He was the son of Edward Nettell Hocking and Eleanor (Nell) Hocking (nee Hill). Besides his twin brother, Harold, he had three sisters, Glad, Gwen and Rita.



Vernon Hocking (on right) with his mother Eleanor and his twin brother Harold, circa 1892

Vernon went to school in North Adelaide and later moved to Le Fevre Peninsula Primary School in Birkenhead where he quickly moved through the classes from 1896 to 1899. In the August of 1899 he moved to a school in Port Adelaide. After finishing his schooling, he worked at Hallett in the Mid North, and on the Eyre Peninsula as a clerk.

Vernon Hocking married Gladys Florrie Windsor in Hallett, in 1911. They had three children, Molly born in 1912 (pre-war), Brian born in 1920 and Kevin born in 1927.

Prior to the Great War, Vernon Hocking served three years with the 16th Australian Light Horse. He joined the war as part of the 3rd Australian Light Horse Regiment. They set sail from Port Adelaide on the 22nd October 1914 on the HMAT Port Lincoln A17 and arrived in Egypt in the second week of December. From here the 3rd Australian Light Horse Regiment joined together with the 1st and 2nd Regiments to form the 1st Light Horse Brigade.



Egypt and Suez Canal during the First World War

The 1st Light Horse Brigade left from Egypt for Gallipoli and arrived on the 12th May 1915, as quoted by Vernon in his diary "*Arrived at Cape Hellenes at Reveille at entrance of Dardanelles.*" (Hocking V, pg 8) The 3rd Light Horse took on a defensive role. They were a reserve for when other regiments attacked. In Gallipoli one of Vernon's jobs was a signaller. The signaller's job would be close to the frontlines, providing communications back to the Battalion HQ and company. The 3rd Light Horse regiment left Gallipoli on the 14th December heading back to Egypt.

In Egypt, the 3rd Australian Light Horse Regiment joined the ANZAC Mounted Division. The regiment was deployed to protect the Nile Valley. On the 18th May, they joined with other forces to protect the Suez Canal.

Vernon then transferred to the 68th (Australian) Squadron on the 9th December 1916 in Kantara, Egypt. The squadron moved to the UK in January 1917 for further training. Then on the 16th September 1917, they deployed for operations on the Western Front.

The 68th (Australian) Squadron's key role was to escort slower and larger aircraft, provide support for the ground troops and to seek out and destroy enemy's aircraft.

In France, Vernon Hocking was a Lance Corporal in the Flying Corps, where he worked as a driver, batman and rigger.

Vernon then returned to Australia on the HT *Devon*, arriving in Melbourne on the 23rd November 1918. From Melbourne, he returned to his home in Adelaide. On the 22nd January 1919, he was discharged from the armed forces.

He served a total of four years and 154 days. And out of this number only 121 days were spent in Australia.

Vernon's day to day life was constantly changing. He could never predict what the following day would bring forth or even if he would see the next sun rise. But the days did continue to roll on. The following day might be a day of active service and conflict, a day of simply relaying messages or a day for rest.

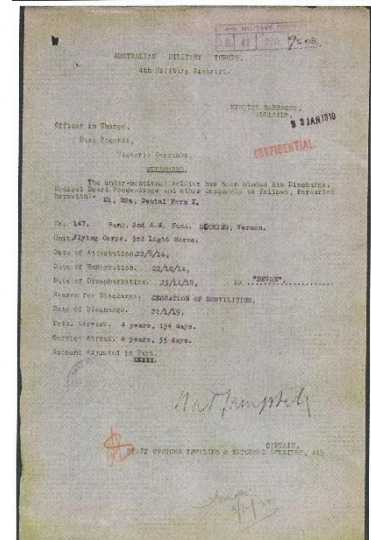
In these days of rest Vernon would keep himself occupied by pursuing his passions and designing rose gardens, as quoted in his diary on the 27th May 1915; "*Studying roses in mail, glad to have something to take my thoughts off the war*". (*Hocking V*, pg 17) Vernon mentions his roses and rose gardens a lot in his diary. I believe this is because it would help bring him back to times at home and bring a sense of a life with normal hopes and dreams to an environment which at times could seem very endless and hopeless.

Vernon was very clever with his hands and carved a chess set during his time in the war. He may have done this for his personal enjoyment but also as a way of destressing in an often intensely stressful environment.



The Ukulele that Vernon Hocking carved

The chess set was carved from wood and the board was drawn on a piece of canvas. Another one of his projects was crafting a ukulele from a wooden aeroplane propeller whilst in France.



Vernon Hocking's Discharge Document



The chess set that Vernon Hocking carved

The ANZAC spirit includes values such as endurance, courage, ingenuity, good humour and mateship. Living on the battlefield would put all your values to the test. You would have seen things that you could never un-see and experienced things that you would carry for the rest of your life.

On Saturday 19th June, Vernon notes in his diary how the soldiers have been keeping their spirits up by “...*play(ing) draughts with stones and revolver bullets,*”(Hocking V, pg 23). This shows the ingenuity of the officers to create good times and entertainment with the little they had.

He also mentions funny little moments that have stood out as a highlight for his day, like when “*Men all over hill start baa-ing like ewes and lambs, sounds quite pastoral*”(Hocking V, pg 23)

Being a part of these moments would have made you feel very connected to your fellow soldiers and boosted your sense of mateship and good humour.

On the 14th May 1915, Vernon Hocking was digging in his dugout, when he stood up to light his pipe. He was holding it in his right hand against his breast when he heard a loud crack. A bullet had broken his pipe and split the top of his thumb, inadvertently acting as a shield for his heart.

To try and stay brave whilst living in such life-threatening situations would have been a very hard mental and physical battle. It would put not only your endurance to the test but also your courage. Once again Vernon demonstrates his ANZAC spirit as his only complaint of this situation in his diary is a simple statement the following night that said, “*Can't sleep tonight, for thumb.*” (Hocking V, pg 10)



Pipe that saved Vernon Hockings life

Another key time I really noticed Vernon Hocking and his mates' ANZAC spirit was when a mate of Vernon Hocking's, Lieutenant Brock, was shot whilst getting into a support trench. “*Bullet entered right side of nose, came out behind left ear.... Miss him very much, his troops are to bury him tonight...Little Johnston, his batman doing his last service, helping to carry him to mortuary on road. Damned hard luck. He's all right and never felt any pain, but very sorry for his girl and people.*”(Hocking V, pg 19)

This would have been a very hard day for Vernon and his mates, having to witness a friend and respected comrade brutally killed in front of you. Even through emotional time, Vernon and his comrades managed to show true ANZAC spirit. They made sure he was given a proper goodbye. They continued on together even though their friend wasn't with them and grieved together for his family and friends.

And at other times their spirits would have been buoyed and the pride for their regiments raised. An example is when Vernon quotes in his diary the following conversation on Saturday 15th May, “*Captain of Grantully Castle told our Quartermaster Sadlier he's been carting troops since beginning of war and has never seen such fine men as our shipment of Australians and New Zealanders. He said the fearlessness of the Australians is exceptional and he reckons 1 Australian is equal to 2 Tommies or any*

other trained troops in the world. They delight in going into danger."(Hocking V, pg 10)

Just like the thousands of other ordinary men and women, when the time of the war came Vernon Hocking signed up to protect his country and help to ensure a better future for his daughter and future sons. It is not just the outstanding memorable soldier that makes the ANZAC spirit it is the thousands of ordinary men and women, just like Vernon Hocking, that ARE the ANZAC spirit.

Lest We Forget



Family photo on return from World War I

From left, Back Row: Fred Hill, Rita, Hilda, Harold, Gwen and Gladys Hocking.
Front Row: Glad and Vernon Hill, Edward, Frank, Elanor, Vernon and Molly Hocking.

References

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Photos

'Broken Pipe', 2016, Colour Photograph, owned by S. Hocking

'Chess Set', 2016, Colour Photograph, owned by S. Hocking

'Discharge Document', 2017, Colour Photograph, L. Stephens

'Family Picture, Woman and Man with Child on Man's Lap', n.d., Black and White photograph, owned by S. Hocking

'Family Picture, two boys and a Woman', 1892, Black and White photograph, owned by S. Hocking

'Male Soldier in Uniform', n.d., Black and White Photograph, owned by S. Hocking

Map showing Cairo and Suez Canal n.d., Photograph, N/A, accessed 27 March 2017, <http://www.tabletmag.com/wp-content/files_mf/1296603184suez.big>.

'Ukulele', 2016, Colour Photograph, owned by S. Hocking

'Whole Family Picture', n.d., Black and White photograph, owned by S. Hocking

Diary

Hocking V, "The Diary of Vernon Hocking 1915-1916", Ed. Stephanie Hocking, Adelaide, 2016.

Interview

Hocking, S 2017, pers. comm., 27 March.

