

2016 Premier's Spirit of ANZAC School Prize

By Samuel Doering

Question: *“Much has been written about how service men and women in World War 1 typified the Anzac Spirit. Using a range of sources, describe the journey of a South Australian man or woman who served on the Western Front during World War 1.”*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

H06203A

Name: Joergen Christian Jensen V.C.

Rank: Private

Service Number: 2389

The remarkable story of Joergen Christian Jensen is seldom told. He was a Danish born, later naturalised Australian citizen who lived and worked in South Australia, calling it his home. Few know about him, despite the fact that for acts of conspicuous bravery, he was awarded the Victoria Cross (VC). He served briefly on the Gallipoli Peninsula and later on the Western Front, seeing the worst of both theatres of war. He was wounded several times and eventually invalided back to Australia, dying from injuries several years after World War One. Little is known about Jensen, but his exceptional tale typifies the ANZAC Spirit and he ought to be given more prominence in accounts of the war.

Background

Jensen was born on the 15th of January, 1891 in Loegstor (Løgstør), Denmark, to Joergen Christian Jensen who was a farmer and wool merchant and his wife Christiana Jensen (nee Sorensen). Little is known of his childhood or education, however it is known that he was the third of four children, although the age and gender of his siblings is not known. Whilst still a teenager, he lived and worked in England for one year. He departed in early 1909 from Cardiff, Wales and arrived in Port Victoria on the 14th of March 1909 on the ship '*Christel*'. His occupation was labouring. A newspaper interview from June 1917 corroborates this when Jensen states that his work was "*generally labouring work on boats and elsewhere on the Murray*" (Adelaide Observer, June 6, 1917 pg.36). He applied to be naturalised in Adelaide, South Australia and this was granted a month after the beginning of World War One on the 7th of September, 1914. His naturalisation application states that he had resided in "*Morgan 2 years, Port Pirie 1 years, London 6 months, [illegible location, but presumably in England] 6 months*" (Jensen, Naturalisation Application, 1914) and at the time of the application he resided at Florence Street, Port Pirie.

Service

Jensen volunteered for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) at the age of 24 years and 2 months on March the 23rd, 1915 at Adelaide, South Australia. Jensen was posted to the 6th reinforcements of the 10th Infantry Battalion of the AIF. The rest of his unit was stationed at Gallipoli, where he joined them in August 1915. According to the official history, "*the 10th Battalion was heavily involved in establishing and defending the front line...*" (AWM, 10th Infantry Battalion, n.d.) which was vital to the Gallipoli campaign. The 10th Battalion left Gallipoli on the 22nd of November 1915 for recuperation on nearby Lemnos Island, but never returned to the peninsula. The 10th Battalion, which was depleted of men, formed the new 50th Battalion and became affectionately known as "*Hurcombe's Hungry Half Hundred*" (AWM, 50th Infantry Battalion, n.d.) after it's first Commanding Officer (CO), Lieutenant Colonel Frederick William Hurcombe. Predominately of South Australian men, the 50th Battalion formed part of the 13th Brigade of the 4th Australian Division. The 50th Battalion left Egypt and arrived in France on the 11th of June. Captain Harold William Hastings Seagar M.C. of the 50th Battalion recalled on the 8th of June that, "*we expect to leave for*

France as soon as other troops replace us here" (Seager, 2015 pg. 227). After arriving, the soldiers were posted to the Western Front. The 50th Battalion attacked Mouquet Farm from August the 13th to 15th. On the 14th of August, Jensen was wounded in action. He took several months to recover from his injuries and was eventually transferred back to his battalion on the 28th of January 1917. During the next few months, Jensen along with the 50th Battalion chased the Germans back to the Hindenburg Line which was the last major line of defence for Germany. Two months after Jensen returned to service, the Australians came to a small village called Noreuil. This was a strategic location which protected the Hindenburg Line and gave the Germans time to properly man their line and a place to establish rear guards.

On the 2nd of April, 1917 the 49th, 50th, 51st and 52nd Australian Infantry Battalions attacked Noreuil aiming to overwhelm the Germans and capture the village. The plan was to have the 52nd Battalion dig in on the north east side and advance upon the town from there, the 50th Battalion to attack from the south, the 51st Battalion to advance from the west and the 49th Battalion to act as reserves. The Australians began attacking at 5 o'clock in the morning of the 2nd of April whereupon the men *"sprang up, following their barrage closely"* (Brooks, n.d. pg. 24). German machine gun posts caused much death, as did unseen trenches. The Germans had occupied a sunken road which was located between the Australian trenches and their objective. Some members of the 51st Battalion rushed past this and once over it, were slaughtered by the Germans now behind them. During the attack at Noreuil, Private Jensen was awarded the VC for acts of conspicuous bravery and courage. His recommendation recounts:

"At Noreuil on the 2nd of April, 1917 this man took charge of five men and attacked a barricade behind which were 40/50 Germans with a machine gun. One of his men shot down the German gunner. Jensen who is a Dane, then rushed the whole post singlehanded and threw a bomb in. He had still a bomb in one hand and taking another from his pocket he drew the pin with his teeth. Threatening them with two bombs, he called on them in German to surrender and bluffed them that they were surrounded by Australians. The enemy dropped their rifles and gave in. Jensen then sent a German to tell another enemy party who were fighting our Stokes Gun to surrender and they too gave in. A different party of our men then saw these Germans for the first time and began firing on them. At considerable risk, Jensen stood up on the barricade, waved his helmet and sent the German prisoners back to our line under an escort of lightly wounded men." (Jensen Collection AWM, 1917, VC Recommendation)

Two days after this act, Jensen was promoted to the position of Lance Corporal. According to the official history of the 50th Battalion, they were *"involved in the battle of Messines between 7 and 12 June and the battle of Polygon Wood on 26 September"* (AWM, 50th Infantry Battalion, n.d.) during the year of 1917. In early 1918, the Russian troops ended their participation in the war due to the Revolution of 1917. To utilise the opportunity, the Germans launched a major offensive on the Western Front. The 50th Battalion had to defend positions over the next two months and stabilise

the situation. One year after Jensen won his VC, the 50th Battalion repelled the largest attack on Australians by Germans on the 5th of April at Dernancourt. Later, on the 25th of April, the 50th Battalion and other Australians engaged in a huge task to capture Villers-Bretonneux. On the 5th of May, Jensen was wounded severely whilst on patrol near Villers-Bretonneux. His injuries were so severe that on the 26th of August, 1917, Jensen was invalided back to Australia. He was discharged from the AIF on the 12th of December, 1918 with the military rank of corporal.

Impact

After the war, Jensen who was plagued by war injuries found work at the Truro Hotel, Truro where he worked at the bottle-oh. Here he met his future wife Katy. The new Mr and Mrs Jensen moved to Adelaide where he worked at a marine store. Although his war injuries may have been mostly physical, some injuries were mental, and on the 31st of May 1922, Jensen was admitted to the Adelaide Hospital in an "*alcoholic mania*" (Nairn and Searle, 1983, pg. 482-83) and he died soon after. He was only 31 years old. His funeral was one of the biggest and most grand when he was buried in the AIF section of West Terrace Cemetery, Adelaide: "*His body was carried on a horse-drawn gun carriage...reported as one of the most impressive funerals...and probably one of the largest military funerals ever held in Adelaide*" (Lang, n.d., pg 3). His early death and the trauma he suffered beforehand shows the devastating impact of World War One on both those who fought and their families.

ANZAC Spirit

Joergen Christian Jensen typified the ANZAC spirit by willingly sacrificing himself to protect his comrades and the German prisoners as he did at Noreuil. His grit, determination and courage during times of great struggle epitomises the sheer will of the Anzacs on the Western front; a notion which is now legendary. By volunteering for the AIF, Jensen fulfilled his patriotic duty and service to his nation. This shows the Anzac spirit because he selflessly joined up for the expressed benefit of Australia. Throughout his time of service, he displayed humility, modesty and the utmost sense of pride and duty in his battalion and nation. He believed that his duty would make a difference, and it did to those whom he sacrificed his safety for. The aforementioned values define the Anzac digger and Jensen displayed these with dignity and honour. Jensen is a remarkable South Australian man whose story should never be forgotten.

Word Count: 1499 words

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