

SERGEANT WILFRED PRIOR CHINNER

26th of July 1896 — 10 of August 1918

Service Number: 3469, 3469B



(Figure 1—Sergeant Wilfred Prior Chinner, 10th Infantry Battalion, AIF, featured in the Bay to Battlefield booklet (Holdfast Bay Council).

PART A- 1508 words (Excluding referencing, bibliography, and brief captions under photographs/images/maps etc as per guidelines)

Born on 26th of July, 1896, in Brighton to parents Grace Harriet Prior and Arthur Robert Chinner.¹ Wilfred Prior Chinner came from a well established and respected family in Brighton. His father was elected as Auditor for the Brighton Council, looking after the city's finances.² Wilfred was educated at Brighton School, and then Adelaide High School respectively. He was very studious, excelling in both Numeracy and English.³ He was active in the Brighton Methodist Church and Sunday school, described as an 'ardent church worker'.⁴ Before his enlistment, he worked as a clerk at the State Savings Bank. Where his manager considered him utterly reliable.⁵ He also had two years of cadet training, which prepared him for his military service, though at the time of enlistment he was unmarried,⁶ leaving behind only his parents and community to bear the weight of his sacrifice.

On the 28th of July, mere days after his nineteenth birthday, Wilfred enlisted in the A.I.F as a private in the 27th Infantry battalion, 8th Reinforcement at Keswick, South Australia.⁷ After his training in Australia, he embarked from Adelaide aboard HMAT Borda on 12th of January 1916,

MARRIAGES.
GREENSHIELDS—THIEM.—On the 25th March, at the residence of the bride's parents, by the Rev. A. J. Fry, William Euson, son of Mr. A. H. Greenshields, to Edith Gertrude, daughter of Mr. H. Thiem, both of Kapunda.
WORDEN—JAMES.—On the 5th April, in the Bible Christian Church, Franklin-street, Adelaide, by licence, by the Rev. J. Foster, John, the son of Mr. George Worden, to Mary Ann, the daughter of Mr. James.
CHINNER—PRIOR.—On the 21st March, at Brighton, by the Rev. J. B. Stephenson, Arthur Robert, fifth son of the late G. W. Chinner, of Brighton, to Grace Harriet, sixth daughter of Samuel Prior, of Brighton.

Figure 1– Trove newspaper notice of the marriage of Wilfred's parents, Grace Harriet Prior and Arthur Robert Chinner.



Figure 2–HMAT Borda (A30), the troopship that carried Wilfred Prior Chinner and other Australian soldiers from Adelaide to Egypt in January 1916.

¹ "Late Sgt. W.P. Chinner, MM" *The Observer*, Adelaide, Saturday, 14 September 1918, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/164162526> [accessed 19 August 2025].

² "Brighton", *The Express and Telegraph*, Tuesday 3 December 1901, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/210534180?searchTerm=Arthur%20Robert%20Chinner> [accessed 19 August 2025].

³ FamilySearch, *Wilfrid Prior Chinner (1896-1918)* <https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/2F99-RRV/wilfrid-prior-chinner-1896-1918> [accessed 19 August 2025].

⁴ Virtual War Memorial, *Wilfred Prior Chinner*, <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/318972>, [accessed 19 August 2025].

⁵ "Our Sainted Dead", *The Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 18 October 1918, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/214067766> [accessed 19 August 2025].

⁶ National Archives of Australia, *Service Record of Wilfred Prior Chinner*, Series B2455, Item 1/1/71, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=3243805&S=1&R=0>, [accessed 19 August 2025].

⁷ The AIF project, *Wilfred Prior Chinner*, <https://aif.adfa.edu.au/showPerson?pid=51904> [accessed 19 August 2025].

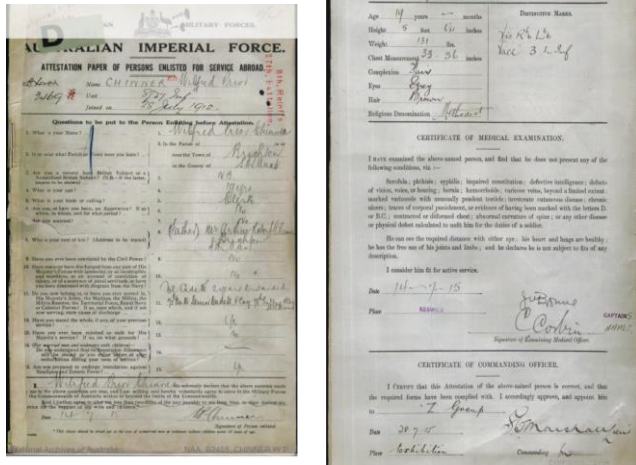


Figure 3 & 4 – Wilfred’s AIF enlistment document and medical examination document. (National

his ability to walk, let alone serve. For many soldiers, this would have indicated the end of service and a return to civilian life.

After months of enduring painful recovery, on the 8th of November, 1916, he’d been discharged from 3rd Auxiliary hospital and then ordered to report to Perham, a convalescent depot, where he would have gradually regained his strength to return to duty. Following his discharge, he marched to the 3rd Training Battalion in England. By early February of 1917, he’d been appointed to the cadre.¹⁰

Yet on 30th of July 1917, he chose to leave the relative safety of training to return to the Western Front, accepting demotion to corporal once again. He left England and embarked for France via Darrington and Stamford, marking the end of his instructional duties and his return to active combat service. Upon arrival in Le Havre just one day later, he was processed through the 1st

bound for Egypt. Following further training at Zeitoun, he transferred to the 10th Infantry Battalion on the 27th of February⁸ – the unit that would define his war service.

In March 1916, the 10th Battalion sailed for Marseille and the Western Front;⁹ this marked the beginning of Wilfred’s own war. Within months of reaching the Western Front, he’d been promoted back up to corporal. However, following his achievement came a cost – on the 1st of August, four months after Wilfred’s arrival in France, he was critically injured, sustaining a gunshot wound to the hip.

The severity of his injury was highlighted by the lengthy medical odyssey that followed. On the 23rd of August, he was admitted to the 1st Canadian General Hospital at Etaples, from there, he’d been evacuated to England, his injury too severe to receive treatment near the front lines. From the months of August to November of 1916, he moved between hospitals including Edmonton to the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital as military doctors worked on restoring

⁸ National Archives of Australia, *Service Record of Wilfred Prior Chinner*, Series B2455, Item 1/4/71, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=3243805&S=1&R=0>, [accessed 19 August 2025].

⁹ Australian War Memorial, *10th Battalion AIF: Unit History*, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51450> [accessed 19 August 2025]

¹⁰ National Archives of Australia, *Service Record of Wilfred Prior Chinner*, Series B2455, Item 1/5/71, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=3243805&S=1&R=0>, [accessed 19 August 2025].

ANZAC Depot. Within days, on the 5th of August, he proceeded from the depot to locate his unit and by the 11th of August, Wilfred had officially rejoined the 10th Infantry Battalion once again.¹¹

Within two months of rejoining the 10th Battalion, Wilfred found himself right in the brutal fighting at Polygon Wood. Weeks of heavy, continuous rain and the intense and prolonged artillery bombardments destroyed the region's drainage systems, creating a battlefield of vicious mud.¹² During the initial fighting, Wilfred quickly distinguished himself through reconnaissance work, during the night his unit had advanced, he'd been sent out on patrol to locate the German positions and survey the terrain. He'd also captured a German gun.

As the German bombardment intensified, Wilfred was twice buried by exploding shells and briefly knocked unconscious, only to be dug out by his officers. Though wounded, he returned to action within days, rejoining the 10th Battalion from a French hospital.

On the night that his company was due to be relieved, he was ordered in daylight to run a message and then bring the relieving company forward to the front. At 6 p.m., Wilfred linked up with the relieving troops and began leading them through the crowded, muddy track toward the battalion headquarters in a pitch black drizzle, Chinner faced disaster when the white tape route suddenly broke. The men halted as he moved forward alone in the darkness, desperately searching for the lost path. Using a flare to orient himself, he briefly mistook a pillbox for their destination before recognising it as an aid post. With battalion headquarters still 400 yards away through the churning mud, he pushed forward with his men.

Without warning, a devastating German barrage came down around them, stopping wouldn't be an option—shell holes were pouring with rainwater. Through quick thinking and determination, Chinner made his company crouch down low while he crept ahead alone, ensuring that they hadn't over shot their outposts. Keeping his direction amidst the chaos, he located the company headquarters and completed the relief.

Against all odds, he brought every man safely, arriving just at 11: 58 pm – the only company not to suffer casualties that night. He notes that other companies were lost or cut up. After guiding them all back to safety, Wilfred had spent his night in a pillbox. At dawn, he'd made his way back to the horselines.

The morning after this heroic action, Wilfred was warned for the Blighty, exhausted and likely wounded from his night of leadership under fire. Nearly six weeks later, the significance of his actions was formally recognised when his commanding officer wrote "Again he, under extremely heavy machine gun fire, went out and directed the relieving Battalion to our line with an absolute

¹¹ National Archives of Australia, *Service of Wilfred Prior Chinner*, Item 1/5/71.[accessed 19 August 2025].

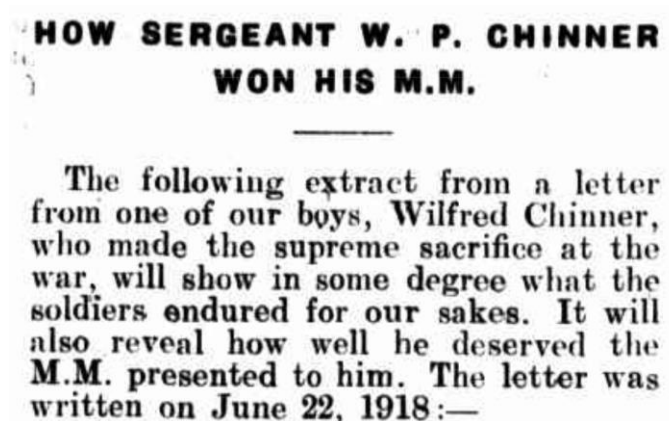
¹²Australian War Memorial, "Battle of Polygon Wood" <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84337> [accessed 19 August 2025]

disregard for his personal safety.”¹³ This official recognition captured not just the danger of that night, but Wilfred’s unwavering devotion to his men and duty. This courage formed the basis for his award of the Military Medal.

On 21st October 1917, Wilfred marched into the 3rd Training Battalion after service in France, a brief respite for retraining before his return to the front¹⁴. By March 1918, he was again ordered overseas, leaving Sutton Veny via Stamford to rejoin the harsh realities of the Western Front.

On the 27th of March 1918, Wilfred marched in from England to Le Havre, rejoining the fight on the Western Front. On March 27th, he moved out to rejoin his unit, the 10th Infantry battalion. By the 31st of March, his return was formally recorded as from the AIF Headquarters in London. Recognition of Chinner’s exceptional leadership extended beyond the Military Medal, his promotion to Sergeant on the 17th of August reflected the army’s confidence in his abilities.

Figure 5—Excerpt from newspaper coverage of Chinner’s Military Medal award, published June 22, 1918. This extract shows contemporary recognition of his heroic leadership under fire (*The Australian Christian*



His final days placed him in the midst of one of the war’s decisive turning points. On August 8th, 1918, the Battle of Amiens began, an offensive so overwhelming that it was named “The black day of the German army.” The 10th battalion had played its part in this triumph, advancing through this heavy resistance as the Allies drove deep into enemy territory. Yet victory came at a price. Sergeant Wilfred Prior Chinner was killed in action on the 10th of August 1918¹⁵, at the age of twenty-two at Creppe Wood¹⁶. His death came just three months before the Armistice would finally silence the guns. The young man who enlisted at nineteen, survived multiple

¹³ Australian War Memorial, ‘Sergeant Chinner, Wilfred Prior’ (AIF) AVM28, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1593188> [accessed 19 August 2025]

¹⁴ National Archives of Australia, *Service Record of Wilfred Prior Chinner*, Series B2455, Item 1/53/71. [accessed 19 August 2025]

¹⁵ Australian Red Cross Society, ‘Chinner, Prior Wilfred’ SA Red Cross Information Bureau https://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/sarcib/SRG76_1_7888.pdf [accessed 19 August 2025].

¹⁶ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, ‘Sergeant Wilfrid Prior Chinner’ CWGC <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/559210/wilfrid-prior-chinner/> [accessed 19 August 2025]

wounds and repeatedly chose to return to combat, would never see the peace his courage had helped secure.

Following his death, his family in Brighton received his Military Medal, Victory Medal, British War Medal, and his Memorial Plaque. His personal effects were sent to his mother and included a wallet, photographs and a certificate. Sergeant Wilfred Prior Chinner was laid to rest at Heath Cemetery, Picardie, France (Plot VII, Row I, Grave No. II)¹⁷, among other soldiers who gave their lives in the First World War. Though far from his hometown, Brighton, his grave remains a lasting tribute to his bravery and devotion.



Figure 8 – Representative image of the medals awarded to Sergeant Wilfred Prior Chinner : Military Medal, British War Medal, and Victory Medal. (Virtual War Memorial Australia).



Figure 6 — Sergeant W.P. Chinner’s grave at Heath Cemetery, Picardie, France (Plot VII, Row I, Grave No. II). (Commonwealth War Graves Commission.)

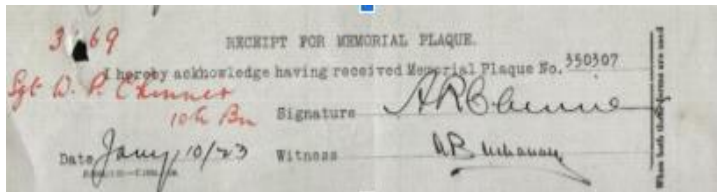


Figure 9– Memorial Plaque receipt commemorating Sergeant W.P. Chinner (National Archives of Australia).

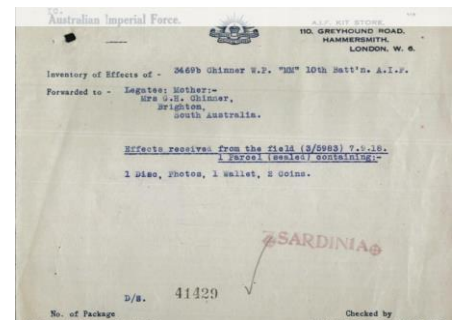


Figure 7 – The official inventory of Sergeant Chinner’s personal effects, forwarded to his mother Grace in Brighton, provided a heartbreaking glimpse into the life cut short. (National Archives of Australia)

¹⁷ AIF Project, ‘Chinner, Wilfred Prior’[accessed 19 August 2025].

Wilfred's story exemplifies two defining characteristics of ANZAC spirit, unwavering perseverance in the face of adversity and courage that extended far beyond personal survival. Wounded twice in battle, he kept returning to the Western Front rather than accept safer alternatives, first leaving his instructor position in England, then rejoining combat after recovering from Polygon Wood. His courage manifested as calculated leadership under perilous conditions, with his priority being the safety of his comrades. When the tape - route had collapsed during the Polygon Wood bombardment in pitch darkness under sustained German fire, Wilfred continuously advanced alone through the artillery to establish a safe passage, bringing out his entire company without a single casualty from what could have been a catastrophic situation. This synthesis of personal determination and selfless leadership embodied the ANZAC ideal at its highest expression, courage that calculated risk for the safety of others and perseverance that turned every setback into unfaltering commitment to his men.



Figure 10– Wilfred Prior Chinner's name inscribed on the Adelaide High School Great War Honour Board (Virtual War Memorial).



Figure 11 — The name of Sergeant Wilfred Prior Chinner, MM, on the Adelaide Savings Bank of South Australia Honour Roll WW1 (Virtual War Memorial).

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PART B - 455 words

What began as a search for basic biographical information on Sergeant Wilfred Chinner revealed a story far richer than expected, uncovering evidence of repeated acts of courage that exemplify the ANZAC spirit: courage and perseverance. My research strategy focused primarily on triangulating military service records with secondary sources and family histories to build a factual yet compelling biography. At first I was anxious to start because I'd never done a research project like this before, but I've always adored history, especially ANZAC history. I first began researching about him at the Virtual War Memorial, Australian War Memorial, and the National Archives of Australia. I found all of his service records, attestation papers, medical examination forms, awards, medal and honour recommendations and lastly letters that were sent to his parents about his death. This heavily contributed to me being able to build a timeline and get an understanding of his life before, during and after service. Initially finding specific details about his Military Medal action proved challenging, as many of the records had brief citations. However cross referencing his service records and Trove articles revealed the full extent of his Polygon Wood heroics. This research process had also taken me a couple of days as I'd worked through the archive's digital collection. Reading the cursive was also very difficult for me, until I'd used the Virtual War Memorial's guide on reading the cursive, which helped incredibly.

A few other sources that I used were Trove articles and the AIF project. The AIF project helped me cross-reference and verify my information. Through this process, I discovered some discrepancies in dates between different archives, but also confirmed that his family was highly respected as they were part of the civic and community fabric of Brighton. Especially his father and his family on his father's side. As mentioned before his father served as Auditor for the Brighton Council and his grandmother (on his father's side) Mrs Samuel Prior was described as, "One of the most widely known and respected citizens of the seaside town."

Showing how much their family was valued within their community. This community context helped me understand that his sacrifice represented not just an individual loss, but a blow to the people of Brighton.

The final sources I consulted — FamilySearch, [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), and the Holdfast Bay Council website – provided information required verification against my primary sources due to inconsistencies. However, they did contribute to the family background information and biographical details. These diverse sources collectively demonstrated both aspects of the ANZAC spirit I identified within Wilfred, his service records documented his perseverance in the face of adversity and through numerous injuries and his M.M citation provided concrete evidence of his courage when protecting his comrades.

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