

## 2017 PREMIER'S ANZAC SPIRIT SCHOOL PRIZE

### ARTHUR FILLIS GRIST

***“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.”***



*Figure 1- Photograph of Arthur F. Grist prior to embarkation, 1915*

On February 26<sup>th</sup> 1915 at Keswick, South Australia, two days' shy of his eighteenth birthday and with his family's support, Arthur Fillis Grist enlisted in the First Australian Imperial Force.

The term 'ANZAC' was originally devised as an acronym for 'Australian and New Zealand Army Corps' when, over a hundred years ago, on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1915, they first landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Since then, it has become a widely-used phrase harbouring multiple connotations. The expression 'ANZAC spirit' or 'ANZAC legend' is perhaps one of the most well-known notions derived from the original meaning of the word. The ANZAC legend is said to have comprehended the idea of Australia's and New Zealand's 'national character', born through the way in which our troops established reputations of strength and bravery whilst fighting in the war.

Although the topic attracts much controversy, the consensus on what is deemed the concept of the ANZAC spirit relates to the collective qualities that the ANZAC soldiers displayed when faced with adversity

during the war. These characteristics are perceived to include; "endurance, courage, ingenuity, good humour and mateship" (awm.gov.au, n.d.).

Arthur Fillis Grist was born in Gawler, South Australia on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1897. He was one of seven children born to his mother Eleanor Tait and his English father Thomas Alfred Grist, an engineer. After having lived and worked in Goolwa, Renmark and Gawler, his parents moved their family for the last time in 1902, where they settled in Unley. As a boy, Arthur attended Unley Primary School, then at its commencement in 1910, moved to Unley High School. Like many boys of his age, he enjoyed playing football for the school.

At sixteen, Arthur made the decision to leave school and take up a carpentry apprenticeship in Adelaide to Charles Rich.<sup>1</sup> Arthur's father was a pioneer in refrigeration engineering, requiring working away from home often, and his older brother had left home. Subsequently, Arthur was also tasked with the responsibilities of being the 'man of the house', a responsibility he took on with much pride.

When enlisting in 1915, Arthur did so with a sense of duty to Great Britain, his father's homeland and with loyalty to his birth country, Australia. As a young man, there was also the sense of excitement for adventure and travel.

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<sup>1</sup> GRIST Arthur Fillis. (n.d.). [Attestation papers, service and casualty forms, military correspondence] National Archives of Australia, B2455.



Figure 2- 'The Blue and Brown Diamond', Colour patch of the 27th Infantry Battalion



Figure 3- The men of No. 3 Platoon, 'D' Company, 27th Battalion of Infantry

Arthur was assigned to the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, Platoon No. 3, D company, raised in March 1915 predominately from South Australian men. They were quite often referred to as 'Unley's Own' as many of the men allotted to the battalion hailed from the Unley district.

On April 16<sup>th</sup> 1915, with little time at hand, the 27<sup>th</sup> marched to the newly established Mitcham Army Camp. Here, they undertook intensive training to prepare themselves as best as possible for the gruelling battles to come. On completion of training at Mitcham, the 27<sup>th</sup> were allocated to the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division AIF and given an embarkation date of May 31<sup>st</sup> 1915 aboard the S.S. Geelong. The day of embarkation was filled with excitement and trepidation. Thousands of people lined the wharf at Outer Harbor to farewell the soldiers who, already showing great courage, waved goodbye, not knowing when or even if they were to return.<sup>2</sup>

Upon landing in Gallipoli on September 12<sup>th</sup> 1915, following additional training in Egypt, the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion reinforced the weary New Zealand and Australian Division. Week after week they endured unrelenting enemy action. The troops were also subjected to poor hygiene and sanitation in the trenches, suffering from dysentery, Typhoid and Tuberculosis. Arthur himself was admitted to hospital December 12<sup>th</sup> with Myalgia,<sup>3</sup> commonly referred to as 'Trench Fever', a bacterium spread in poor conditions by lice. He was

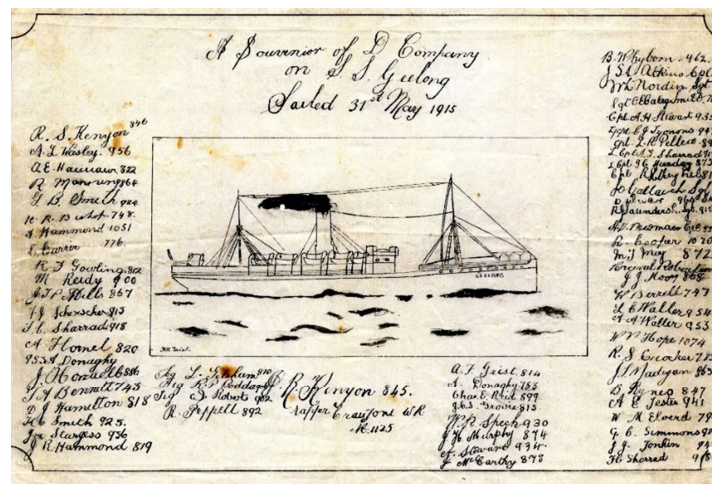


Figure 4- 'A souvenir of D Company on S.S. Geelong, Sailed 31<sup>st</sup> May 1915'. Members of No. 3 Platoon signed piece of silk. Steam ship drawn by Hugh Roberts Grist (Arthur's younger brother)

<sup>2</sup> 1915 'The Brave 27th Battalion.', The Port Augusta Dispatch, Newcastle and Flinders Chronicle (SA: 1885 - 1916), 8 October, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> GRIST Arthur Fillis. (n.d.). [Attestation papers, service and casualty forms, military correspondence] National Archives of Australia, B2455.

hospitalised for nearly three months during which time he and the Allied Soldiers were withdrawn from Gallipoli back to Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

In mid-March 1916, the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division disembarked from Egypt and proceeded to Marseilles, France. From here, the 27<sup>th</sup> entered the front-line trenches for the first time, taking control of Armentieres, a relatively small, quiet sector of the front near the Belgian border. This sector was colloquially known as 'The Nursery' as it was here that troops new to the Front were educated in the aspects of 'Trench Warfare'.

On May 9<sup>th</sup> Arthur reported sick to the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance being diagnosed with Pharyngitis, often caused by exposure to gas. Quick to recover, he re-joined the 27<sup>th</sup> four days later at Armentieres.

Due to his previously acquired carpentry skills, Arthur was sent to the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Company Engineers at Romarin on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. This company spent time excavating, widening, deepening and draining trenches, raising duckboards, constructing dugouts and observation posts, repairing parapets and more.<sup>5</sup> Arthur served with them until July 10<sup>th</sup> when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division were ordered to transfer out of the Romarin trenches and march towards the Somme, thus re-joining the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

Shortly after arrival at the Somme battlefield, Arthur was transferred to the 7<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company. The following day, he joined other newly recruited men to be instructed on the workings and operations of the Vickers Medium Machine Gun.<sup>6</sup> Operation of this highly successful battlefield machine gun required a tripod mount and crew of three men as they were not easily transported. On the night of July 29<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company backed up the infantry battalions involved in an attack on the German line around the area of Pozières. The following day, Commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company, Captain Radford wrote in his diary,

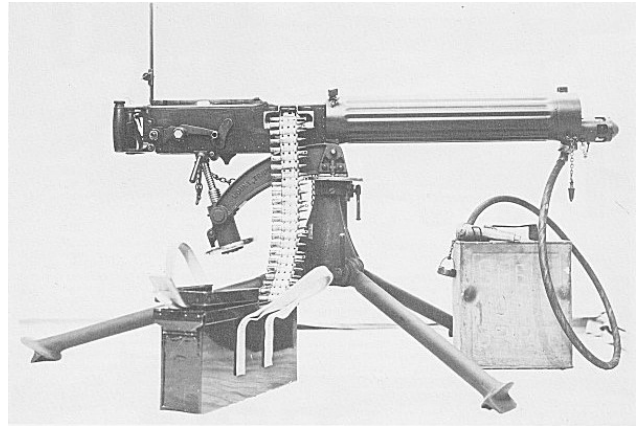


Figure 5- Vickers Medium Machine Gun

*"Full use was made of the men recently attached, carrying belt boxes, water etc. and it was found that without them it would have been impossible to set sufficient ammunition to the line to make us carry on."*<sup>6</sup>

Although this attack was mostly effective, resulting in the capture of additional German positions beyond the village of Pozières, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division suffered profoundly from German artillery bombardment, reporting high casualty lists.

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<sup>4</sup> Darlington, R., Smithies, G. and Wood, A. (2013). *History alive 9 for the Australian curriculum*. 1st ed. Milton, Qld.: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Chapter 8: World War I (1914-1918), pp. 224-259.

<sup>5</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Australian Engineers, June 1916. [Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries] Australian War Memorial, AWM4 14/25/8.

<sup>6</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Australian Machine Gun Company, July 1916. [Australian Imperial Forces unit war diaries] Australian War Memorial, AWM4 24/12/3.

After a small respite for rest and reinforcements at several 'quiet' sectors along the front, the 7<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company were transferred back to the Somme. In early November, the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade were involved in preparations for an attack against German positions at Flers.<sup>7</sup> The following day, August 4<sup>th</sup>, the attack was launched but proved unsuccessful. During this time, Arthur was severely sick, yet showing endurance and strength of character, remained on duty. Three days later, once the attack had subsided, he was admitted to hospital where he remained for the majority of the month. He was then 'taken on strength' from Base Depot and re-joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company. Whilst Arthur was in hospital, his unit undertook a second attack at Flers which, like the first, proved unsuccessful and resulted in a forced withdrawal from the Somme battlefield. At this point in time, the Somme battlefield had been transformed into a sea of mud and slush because of the deluge of late autumn rains.



*Figure 6- Colour patch of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion*

From September 1917, the 7<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company took part in several major battles around Ypres, providing back-up fire for the infantry battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>8</sup> During the Battle of Menin Road, fought on September 20<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade were designated to the fighting as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's first wave against the German forces. Victory for the Allied Forces at Menin Road was shortly followed by the success in the objectives of the Battle of Broodseinde Ridge, the brigade's last major offensive of 1917.

In late February 1918, the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Companies merged to form the 2<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion. Subsequently, on March 1<sup>st</sup> 1918, Arthur was promoted from Private to Lance Corporal. The following day, he was granted leave to the U.K, returning on March 20<sup>th</sup>.

From late March through to May 1918, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion took part in the German Spring Offensive. Commencing early August, the battalion fought in the Allied Hundred Days Offensive in conflicts including; the Battle of Amiens, the Second Battle of the Somme and the Battle of St. Quentin Canal. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, after days of heavy fire from the enemy, many of the battalions' machine guns had been 'blown out'.<sup>9</sup> Arthur was hit by shrapnel from one of these guns and was reported 'wounded in action'. However, showcasing determination and resilience, he remained at his post and on duty.

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<sup>7</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Australian Machine Gun Company, November 1916. [Australian Imperial Forces war diaries] Australian War Memorial, AWM4 24/12/7.

<sup>8</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Australian Machine Gun Company, September 1917. [Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries] Australian War Memorial, AWM4 24/12/16.

<sup>9</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Australian Machine Gun Company, October 1918. [Australian Imperial Forces unit war diaries] Australian War Memorial, AWM4 24/12/29.

Finally, the destruction and devastation of the 'Great War' was brought to an end on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918.

On January 10<sup>th</sup> 1919, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion 'marched out' for return to Australia, boarding the 'Warwickshire' and returning home May 24<sup>th</sup> 1919.

Throughout the war, Arthur witnessed many horrors. He endured the deaths of good mates, including his close cousin, Lindsay Ray Dodd, 4776. Despite this, he believed that fighting for his country was the right thing to do. So much so, that he applied for enlistment in the Royal Australian Air Force in WWII, but was rejected due to scarring of the lungs, probably as a result of Tuberculosis and toxic gas exposure.

Although he was not decorated for his bravery or courage, Arthur Fillis Grist was a keen 'Aussie' soldier, reflecting the ANZAC spirit through his immense levels of endurance and determination and showing pride and loyalty to his homeland. When Arthur was discharged from duty on July 25<sup>th</sup> 1919, he was forever physically and mentally changed from the young man he was on enlistment, over four years previous.

Arthur Fillis Grist was my great-grandfather. Although I never met him, I find his story inspiring and hope that I may display such qualities during my life.



Figure 7- War medals received by A.F. Grist- 1914/15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal

## APPENDIX:



Figure 8- A.F. Grist's name on Honour Roll, St. Augustine's Anglican Church, Unley SA



Figure 9- Grave of A.F. Grist, St. Jude's Church of England Cemetery, Brighton SA

### **The Brave 27th Battalion.**

'Twas on the thirty-first of May,  
Not one will ever forget the day,  
All rose at four—'twas dark as ink—  
To eat our breakfast and sup our drink :  
The " Fall in " sounded at eight o'clock  
sharp,  
And from Mitcham camp we soon did  
part.  
With full pack-up we marched to the  
train,  
Knowing not if we should return again,  
Yet, smiling here and saluting there,  
Perhaps parting from friends for many a  
year ;  
All soon arrived at the Outer Harbour,  
Crowded with people and flags in splen-  
dour.  
We soon were up on the S.S. Geelong,  
Harking to the farewells shouted by the  
throng,  
The Cheer-up Society were prominent  
there,  
To bid us " bon voyage," to play the  
game fair ;  
'Twas they who to us presented the  
colours  
Which stirred the hearts of us sons of  
our mothers.  
We steamed across the notorious Bight,  
Where many have spent an anxious  
night ;  
The seventh day out we passed Boltneß,  
How pleased we were you all can guess ;  
But when in port we learnt " no leave,"  
The Twenty-seventh Boys got a scheme  
up their sleeve.  
Many broke ship—and some returned,  
Others the voice of conscience spurned,  
They followed us later in another boat—  
Sadder and wiser through playing the  
goat ;  
In the West they call us the " dirty  
twenty-seven,"  
If their hopes are granted we'll ne'er  
reach heaven.

Yet another month on the sea we spent,  
Many times to our feelings we did give  
vent,  
For the tucker we had was often bad,  
Not a square meal once—it's true, by  
gad ;  
The skipper and steward, a damn bad  
pair,  
You can bet a dollar they had their share.  
A memorable ride from Suez to Cairo,  
Eighty miles or more, and yet it seemed  
As if we had left ship but five minutes  
ago,  
Few of us there would ever have dreamed  
Such beautiful scenery as our eyes had  
gleaned  
Could be found in the old country of  
Pharoah.  
Full many a tale will yet be told  
To sweethearts by lovers both brave and  
bold,  
How they fought like demons to retain  
the good name  
Of the Twenty-seventh Battalion, and be  
proud of the same ;  
For, when in the field, without doubt  
will compare,  
With the bravest of lads who left South  
Aust. so fair.

Figure 10- 'The Brave 27th Battalion', a poem published in the 'Port Augusta Dispatch', October 1915



Figure 11- Swagger stick crafted from .303 bullets by A.F. Grist, post WWI



Figure 12- Razor belonging to A.F. Grist during WWI

**HONOURING A SOLDIER.**  
On Thursday evening, at the residence of Mr. A. T. Grist, Cambridge terrace, Malvern, a "send-off" was given to Mr. Arthur Grist, second son of Mr. A. T. Grist, who will shortly leave for the front. About 30 guests were present, and the tables were decorated with the colours of the Allies. After the loyal toasts had been honoured, the health of the departing soldier was drunk with musical honours. Mr. Grist responded on behalf of his son. Vocal and instrumental numbers appropriate to the occasion were rendered.

Figure 13- Farewell party for A.F. Grist

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Figure 9: Grist, J., 2017. *Grave of A. F. Grist, St. Jude's Church of England Cemetery, Brighton SA*. [Unpublished photograph] [Accessed 18 Apr. 2017]

Figure 8: Grist, J., 2017. *A. F. Grist's name on Honour Roll, St Augustine's Anglican Church, Unley SA* [Unpublished photograph] [Accessed 20 Apr. 2017]

Figure 11: Grist, J., 2017. *Swagger stick crafted from .303 bullets by A. F. Grist, post WWI* [unpublished photograph] [Accessed 21 Apr. 2017]

Figure 12: Grist, J., 2017. *Razor belonging to A.F. Grist during WWI* [Unpublished photograph] [Accessed 21 Apr. 2017]

Figure 1: Sourced by Grist, L., 2017. *Photograph of Arthur F. Grist prior to embarkation, 1915* [Unpublished image]

Figure 4: Sourced by Grist, L., 2017. *'A souvenir of D Company on S. S. Geelong, Sailed 31<sup>st</sup> May 1915'. Members of No. 3 Platoon signed piece of silk. Steam ship drawn by Hugh Roberts Grist* [Unpublished image]

Figure 7: Grist, J., 2017. *War medals received by A. F. Grist- 1914/15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal* [Unpublished photograph] [Accessed 3 May 2017]

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Figure 13: 1915 'HONOURING A SOLDIER.', *The Register (Adelaide, SA: 1901 - 1929)*, 14 May, p. 8., viewed 5 Mar 2017, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article59612953>

Figure 10: 1915 'The Brave 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion.', *The Port Augusta Dispatch, Newcastle and Flinders Chronicle (SA: 1885 - 1916)*, 8 October, p. 3., viewed 5 Mar 2017, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article196802796>

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Figure 6: *Colour patch of the 2nd Machine Gun Battalion*. (n.d.). [image] Available at: <https://www.google.com.au/search?q=2nd+machine+gun+battalion+colour+patch&rlz> [Accessed 2017].

Figure 5: *Vickers Medium Machine Gun*. (n.d.). [image] Available at: <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-conflicts-periods/ww1/1aif/supports.htm> [Accessed 2017].