

To Gallipoli and Back,
the Life and Times of William Wesley Tiller, Reg. No. 1450
By Dion Anderson



**Henry Stanley Tiller (Left) beside his father
William Wesley Tiller (Right), circa 1939**
Courtesy of Gene Cheatle

This essay is split 3 ways in dedication.

First to Gene Cheatle,

Who largely assisted in my enquiries concerning William Wesley Tiller.

To those people who have been touched by the Anzac spirit which lives within all free
Australians.

And finally to those who have died in the name of our country, in all theatres of war.

Requiescat In Pace

RIP

A Journey to Gallipoli and Back, the Life and Times of William Wesley Tiller

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Introduction

William Wesley Tiller was an ordinary Australian in the true sense of the word. Not only did he work off the land and have a family as many Aussies have done and will continue to do, he also served his country and survived not one but two wars. William Wesley Tiller was a digger and that is enough.

Early Life

Born to Mr. Stanley Hall Tiller and Ms. Catherine Longmire on the 7th of May 1897, William Tiller was largely brought up in a rural farming community on the Eyre Peninsula in a town called Kybunga where the family lived and worked on their farm. He was the eldest son in his family and he had 2 brothers and 3 sisters. Not much could be found concerning William Tiller's early life but it is assumed that he was educated for at least some time and eventually began working on the family's farm. He also would have met his sweetheart Ms. Nellie Victoria Bartlet and they almost certainly began to court prior to his 18th birthday.

The World at War (WWI)

When war broke out in Europe in 1914 between Austria and Hungary largely due to the assassination of Prince Ferdinand, life went on in the other parts of the world that were thus far unaffected by the unrest including Australia. Even while Austria and Hungary began to call upon their allies for assistance, life that had remained relatively free from major disruption for Australia's relatively short unification continued on. But when the motherland called for assistance in what was a rapidly growing war, Australia answered the call. Australian's were to get a rather rude awakening and eventually receive their 'baptism' by the fire of war. When the call came for soldiers, William Tiller answered the call of the motherland as did countless others. William Tiller enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force at the Keswick Barracks when he was only 18 years of age on the 10th of July 1915. Specifically, he enlisted into the 9th Light Horse Division, 11th reinforcements as a private. He was given some training in Melbourne and prior to departure was paid 5 shillings per diem. Tiller began his journey when he embarked from Melbourne bound for Egypt on the 27th of October 1915, on board the HMAT Ulysses. Nothing is known concerning the ocean voyage but it is clear he eventually landed in Heliopolis in Egypt. Whilst undergoing training, he visited some of the local attractions and on visiting the pyramid of Cheops remarked "how it was moved] into position is marvellous" in a letter he wrote to his sweetheart, Nellie. He rarely spoke in detail of events that were occurring but in a letter to Nellie concerning Christmas in Egypt he wrote:

"On Christmas Day, we all got our billy cans that were sent from Australia. We had quite a lively time, everyone diving into their billy to see what they received; I got a very good billy."

He also stated the items he received. Some of them are "ciggies, almonds, and

handkerchiefs." Much of his time overseas is largely unknown but it is known that he did at least serve in Gallipoli for some time as a gunner in the trenches. The only known thing he said concerning his time fighting in Gallipoli is in a letter written to Nellie in which the only words written are "Just back from Gallipoli, didn't like it much." These words, few though they maybe, say it all. It is clear that he observed horrors as all of his comrades did that could not be openly spoken of. Of what they were, it will probably be never known and perhaps it is but for the best. He transferred to the 3rd Light Horse Reserve Regiment on the 6th of March 1916 and served for only a month until he transferred into the 5th Division Artillery on the 1st of April. It is known that William Tiller transferred at least once more to another division although to what and when is not quite clear. It is believed by his daughter that he served in France moving guns to the front line using horses which it is reported he was particularly skilled with. Tiller was admitted to hospital a number of times for a variety of reasons including influenza although the other reasons are not clear. He also was given leave twice to journey to the United Kingdom to visit relatives and rest from the war. Information concerning his time in the UK is scarce and thus his activities will remain a mystery. The First World War finally ended in 1918 and William Tiller finally returned to Australia on the 27th of April 1919.

The Post War Years and the Depression

Following his discharge from the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), he married his childhood sweetheart Nellie Victoria Bartlet although the date and year is uncertain, it is likely to have been shortly following his return. The new family moved to Hallbury to farm and began to settle down. In the following years, Nellie fell pregnant and gave birth to 2 daughters; Gene and Catherine Annie and 3 sons; Henley Stanley, John and Richard Winston. Of the 3 sons, only Henry Stanley went on to serve in WWII in the Air Force as a gunner in which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal for shooting down a plane of the Luftwaffe. The family moved to Karkoo on the Eyre Peninsula although the date on which this occurred is unknown. On the farm at Karkoo he did work until war broke again in 1939.

The World at War Again (WWII)

The 'war to end all wars' had ended merely 21 years previous yet the pains and horrors of war had obviously become memories of horrors past as the world was once again plunged headlong into war again. This time it was not Austria that triggered the explosive force of war but an overzealous returned serviceman of Germany with radical ideas who rose to political power and began to enact plans to enact revenge upon those he viewed as responsible for Germany's humiliating defeat at the conclusion of the First World War. When Adolf Hitler and the Nazis invaded Poland, it was not long before the United Kingdom and the states of the Commonwealth declared war. The world was at war yet again! Once again, William Tiller answered the call, despite having been witness to the atrocities that war truly is. However, Tiller was not the nimble young man that once he was, neither was he free of dependants as he was originally when first he answered the call from England. Perhaps all of these factors and others contributed to his enlistment being

contested. However, after what perhaps was a brief contest, Tiller was accepted but instead of being sent to the war, worked on the home front in Adelaide. He became a corporal in charge of the mess in Wayville in what is now the Wayville Showgrounds. It was here that trains loaded with those troops enlisted to the war effort stopped for a short time and where the troops were fed and given basic supplies as they passed through Adelaide bound for places unknown. As far as it is known, he spent all the war years here until the eventual conclusion of a very bloody and horrifying war in 1945.

Post Patriotic Years

With the wars over, life largely continued on for William Tiller, as life always does, even after such events. Tiller and his family moved from Kybunga to Armagh and there he worked as a herd tester for an unknown period of time. At some time, Tiller put in for a war service block for his service to the country in war and was thus given a block of land on the Limestone Coast of South Australia at a place known as Greenway. Here he built a small farm which contained small amounts of cattle, sheep and cows. He lived at Greenway for the remainder of his life until he eventually passed away on the farm at the age of 73. It is uncertain what caused his death but it is likely to have been a heart attack.

William Tiller and the Spirit of Anzac

An ordinary Australian who did extraordinary things. That is perhaps the best way to describe William Wesley Tiller. He never asked for thanks, or little else for that matter and this makes him a classic example of an Aussie digger. He merely knuckled down and did what needed to be done at the time. However, this begs the question whether he embodied the spirit of Anzac? The simple definition of the spirit of Anzac is an AIF or ADF personnel who exhibits the spirit of the Anzacs. William Tiller fits this simple description. Furthermore, when he served in the AIF, he displayed many of the traits of Anzac. These include: courage (in going to war and fighting), loyalty (to other personnel and country), patriotism (enlisting in WWI and WWII), honour (in war and to country), mateship (working with mates to achieve a common goal), bravery (fighting in war) and resilience (in fighting in WWI and WWII). Not only did he do this, but he went on to live a prosperous life after serving the nation.

Conclusion

William Wesley Tiller, a soldier, a digger, a fighter, a survivor, a farmer, a husband, a father, an Australian, an ANZAC, and that is enough.

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