

The Story of Cecil Edward Turner 1881 – 1918

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Cecil Edward Turner is my Great, Great Grandfather, of my mother's side. He served during the First World War in April 1918. What drew me most about researching the life of Cecil was that little was known about his life before and during the war. All I could find was facts, dates, and the times that his name would be projected at the Australian War Memorial. The first time I glanced through his records, I had made my decision. Through this research, I sought to give Cecil the recognition that he deserves for his courage in the War. I endeavour to share Cecil's tragic story of war so that it is not forgotten.

Cecil Edward Turner was born in Hamley Bridge, South Australia as Spring was beginning on the 18 September 1881. Cecil was not tall, standing at 5 foot 7 and weighing 132 pounds (60kg). He had fair complexion, with blue eyes and dark brown hair. As an adult he married Louisa Jane Turner. They had two boys: Alan and Howard. Howard would grow up to be an accountant and farmer and is my great grandfather. Cecil pursued a Methodist religion and was raised in Adelaide and underwent his education at Sturt Street School, which still operates today. The small Turner family resided at their farm on 18 George Street Halifax, South Australia. Cecil was a hardworking farmer and a member of the Cummins Rifle Club. 27 July 1917. During times of war men joined rifle clubs as an act of service (reserve).



Cecil Edward Turner's Portrait

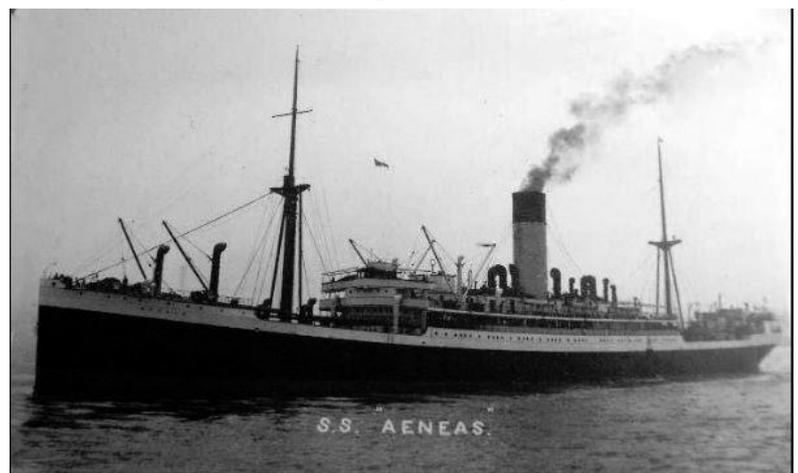
The 10th battalion was formed in South Australia and was one of the first to be established in response to the declaration of the war. However, for reasons unknown, Cecil did not enlist for the war until the 27 July 1917, three years after the first call to war. Perhaps it was Cecil's older age, or the responsibilities of the farm, or the pressure to join the soldiers and serve his country that postponed his enlistment. Nevertheless, Cecil ultimately signed up to fight and left Louisa and young Alan and Howard, now aged roughly 3 years 6 months and

2 years and 2 months, respectively. The pen connecting to the paper and the swift movement of his signature was all it took to sign his life away to the War. On the 30 October 1917, Cecil was aboard the HMAT A60 troop ship, destined for Devonport, England. The voyage to Devonport, England, took 38 days and Cecil's arrival and disembarking from the ship finally occurred on the 27 December 1917. On the 8 February 1918 Cecil suffered from Rheumatism and was placed in military hospital. He was discharged from the hospital on the 16 February 1918 but a week later on the 23 February 1918 he was placed in hospital again, this time in Sutton Veny Hospital, presumably still afflicted with rheumatism. Cecil was discharged from hospital for the second time on the 1 April 1918.

He travelled overseas to Dover, then crossed the English Channel to Calais, France and finally proceeded to his unit on the 9 April 1918. On 13 April 1918 Cecil was moved from the 25th reinforcements to the 10th Battalion in preparation for battle.

Cecil was given the service number 7561 joined the 10th infantry battalion to make up the 3rd Brigade. With no previous military experience, having experience only from farming and rifle club he prepared for war. Research indicates that the 10th Infantry Battalion battled through trench warfare from 1916 to 1918. In March, and April the 10th Battalion contributed to stopping the German Spring Offensive. The 10th Battalion served a role in the Battle of the Amiens in 1918, which proved to be one of the greatest offensive actions the allied powers achieved. The 10th Battalion's rifles were lowered in September 1918, they then began their journeys home to Australia. Cecil served for Australia from the 13 April until 24 April, where he was killed in action. His death likely occurred while defending the German Spring Offensive, as the 10th Battalion fought in this area during the time of his death.

His body has laid at rest in the battle fields of France since the 24th April 1918. He was aged 33 years. After Cecil's death, his estate on 18 George Street off of Gilles Street Adelaide South Australia was willed to his wife Louisa. Louisa remarried and one son Howard moved to Tasmania to pursue careers in farming and accounting.



MHAT A60 Aeneas. This was the ship that Cecil travelled on to France. It transported soldiers from Australia to Europe on countless other journeys.

Cecil Edward Turner's courage and sacrifice is commemorated with the British war medal and the Victory medal, which acknowledges the victory of the Allied forces during World War One. His life and sacrifice during World War One is commemorated by a headstone located in the Meteran Military Cemetery in France on plot 3, row M, grave number 917.

Just Imagine

This piece is inspired and based on the life of Cecil Edward Turner.

Just imagine, Cecil Edward Turner climbs the steps of his South Australian home, brushing off a day's work from his hands and shirt. The floorboards creak, like the branches of a gum tree on a windy day. He guides himself through the house and heads towards the kitchen. Through the hallway he strides, capturing a glance of his reflection in a window. His blue eyes look back, like an ocean on a warm summer's day. Cecil runs a hand through his brown hair which is sweaty from the scorching spring sun. He wanders into the kitchen, where his wife Louisa cooks. Their two sons, Alan aged 3 years 6 months and Howard, aged 2 years and 2 months, scamper around the floor, unaware that their beloved father would soon be embarking on his journey to war. Louisa looks at him and smiles, a smile with a hint of sadness. For her husband is going to war. She fears for him, probably more than he fears for himself. Louisa walks over and hugs him, and the kids latch their small hands onto his legs and tug on his trousers, chattering and laughing. The little family stands slightly longer than usual. For they fear it may be their last.

Cecil Turner enlisted for the 10th Australian Infantry Battalion in South Australia on 27 July 1917. Cecil embarked on his journey of uncertain return from Melbourne, Victoria on 30 October 1917. He sailed on board the HMAT A60 Aeneas troop ship headed for Devonport, England, the beginning of his journey to France.

Like so many other soldiers, war became Cecil's life. It enveloped his being. At night guns would echo in the distance. Whether they were being heard in the present or in their nightmares was indistinct. Soon, the sound of rain and hail pelting down on Cecil's South Australian farmhouse changed to the sound of shells falling from the smoky, polluted skies and plummeting into no man's land, leaving craters, like asteroids. The weight of farm machinery that Cecil carted around the farm morphed to the guns, heavy jackets, shoes, helmets and bags that soldiers carried around the barren, polluted wasteland of the western front.

Just imagine a scene. Where Cecil Turner is surrounded by the other members of the 10th Infantry Battalion. Not only fellow soldiers, but also friends. When guns are fired and echo through the sky, and tanks shake the souls of the soldiers walking the land, the men

stand by one another. When soldiers rest in the trenches, refuelling their tired bodies, they chat, sharing a rare smile and checking up on their fellow mates.

Now just imagine the gunfire over their heads as the 10th Battalion advance during the third battle of Ypres. Eager to capture the village and the victory. But victory did not come without a price. As Dead trees stand as scrawny silhouettes against the hazy sky thick with gun smoke. Craters are scattered across the land, full of mud and water and gripping into the soldiers who pass through. Armoured tanks lay upended, enveloped by the merciless mud. Cecil Turner staggers through the battlefield, shoes covered in mud. Hauling his rifle, a mud-caked uniform, and a pack upon his fatigued shoulders. His heart is beating out of his chest. Out of the corner of his eye he sees the opposition line of a nearby trench, and they are armed.

And then, it stops ends. It all ends with a shot. One weapon fired; a life lost in return. Cecil lost his life in France on the 24 April 1918. He was a man in the wrong place at the wrong time. And his death fired a hole in the hearts of those who loved him.

I never met you in person, for we lost you before I joined the world. But I believe I have seen a part of you through this research. I can just imagine. You must have been brave, with nerves of steel, because you joined the war, you put our life on the line for your family, and your country. And you were caring. You looked after your young boys and had the strength to leave them, for such a cause. So maybe right now, we could just imagine Cecil Turner standing right just over there, watching over the sun as it sets on the horizon. Rays of sun cast over his shoulder. Wearing his soldier uniform, and feeling strong, and brave, and thinking about his family. And how he would come home. A moment of peace, before the harsh realities of war came to life.

So maybe every time we see a ray of sunlight, maybe we could just imagine the life of every soldier, and how their actions changed the world, and how their sacrifice, is our gift of life.



Presenting my research to the other members of the FMMP group overlooking the coast of Albany, WA.