



## Missing Soldiers of Fromelles Discussion Group

Besides assisting Dr Roger Freeman with information to support the writing of the battalion history titled *Second to None*, Reginald Bonney has also provided Dr Jonathan King with information about his grandfather George Edward Bonney, which details his experience of Egypt and France with the 32nd Infantry Battalion, a combined South Australian and Western Australian unit. Private George Edward Bonney was an early volunteer as his Service Number is recorded on the AWM 145 Roll of Honour Cards as 44.

### 44 Private George Edward Bonney

*(Background provided by Reginald George Bonney to supplement his Guest Book entry.)*

KIA on 19 July 1916 at Fleurbaix, George Edward Bonney enlisted at Unley, South Australia. According to War Grave Register Notes, he was aged 41 (born 23 August 1876, Unley, SA), the son of William Lambourne Bonney and Eliza Johanna Bonney, and husband of Florence Mabel Cook (formerly Bonney), and served with "A" Company. Commemorated at VC Corner Australian Cemetery Memorial, Fromelles in northern France, he embarked on HMAT Geelong [A2] on the 18th November 1915, in Adelaide together with future son-in-law Gordon Mills, and has an Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau file which is currently held by the Australian War Memorial. File No.: 0450703J shows Bonney was said to be one of the first men killed when the 32nd Battalion leapt over the parapet at Fromelles, an event supposedly witnessed by 53 L/Cpl. M. M. Brown.

This was attested to by 498 Cpl. H. W. Furze, and reported upon by M. J. Garrard who relied on 102 C. Haines as an Informant while he was convalescing at the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth. S.W.

Bonney enlisted on the 1st July 1915, being a printer's machinist with the Government Printing Office, in South Australia; while Mills was employed as a trimmer, according to the information that he provided.

Reginald George Bonney, aka Reg, is named after both grandfathers who "paid the price of victory" in Europe during WW1. 143 Pte. Gordon Mills was initially admitted to 14 GH Wimereux on the 21st July 1916, with a shattered hand. He was transferred to Orpington, England via Bologne for treatment and repatriation and was eventually accepted as T & PI WEF on 19 July 1951. Gordon passed away on 16th



**PHOTOGRAPH:** "At Ease" - 44 Private George Edward Bonney, 32nd Battalion, AIF. [Photograph courtesy of R. G. Bonney].

November 1952, while IP at RGH, Springbank, South Australia. He is buried in Centennial Park, South Australia.



**PHOTOGRAPH: 143 Private Gordon Mills, 32nd Battalion, AIF** - "A quiet, reflective moment before leaving Australia to enter the fray". [Provided courtesy of R. G. Bonney from his private collection of family history materials].

Although little is known of the war service of either man before the Battle of Fromelles because of the lack of information contained in their service records, the War Diary of the unit, the chronology contained in Roger Freeman's book, and various extant letters home from Bonney that are still in the possession of the family, it is understood they relieved front line troops.

From what has been documented by grandson Reg, George Edward Bonney was originally allocated service No.: B2224 and was assigned, together with Gordon Mills who enlisted on the same date as Bonney and allocated service No.: B2251(as per Pay Office record, Keswick) to "K" Group Base Infantry between the 1st July 1915 to 15 August 1915. Like George Bonney, Gordon Mills then transferred to the 32nd Battalion with No. 143. Mills was aged 19 years and two months when he enlisted.

Born in Richmond, Victoria in 1896, Gordon had three years Senior Cadet service before joining the AIF. He had previously been "rejected from Militia for eye sight", as is shown by his Attestation Paper according to Reg. Mills declared his parents were deceased on enlistment and gave the name and Adelaide address of his married sister as next-of-kin.

Dr King apparently intends to use the background provided by Reginald in a new publication, to be released in time for the 90th anniversary of the Armistice. Although Reg is not convinced that the remains of Bonney, GE are at Pheasant Wood he believes the remains of the recently discovered soldiers should be identified. He suggests that regardless of the whereabouts of the remains of his paternal grandfather, the servicemen found at

Fromelles, "deserve an honourable re-interment, either in that same area or in consecrated ground nearby."

Reg reports that he “understands those who have seen the state in which the remains are currently, are disgusted by the sight. We, Britain and her then Colonies, owe them BIG time.”

Furthermore Reginald suggests, “The remains of other servicemen from later conflicts have had a dignified re-interment in recent years. Admittedly, in those cases, the numbers were insignificant when compared to the likely 400 at Pheasant Wood. However, the precedent is there.”

Reg is a member of the NSW Nashos which contributes to promoting the appropriate use of the original Ingleburn Army Camp, now known as the Ingleburn Military Heritage Precinct, in conjunction with a number of interested parties. The Precinct Committee also includes two local councils and the Ingleburn RSL Sub-Branch. Prior to this he completed two years with the Army Cadets at Christian Brothers College, in Adelaide between 1950-51 and subsequently 14 months as a cadet seaman/writer with the RAN between 1954-56. During this period he underwent training at HMAS Rushcutter. National Service training followed with the RANR (NS) No.: 6246, with basic training at HMAS Penguin, gunnery training at HMAS Cerberus and sea time on HMAS Sydney III. He was discharged from that obligation on 30 June 1960, Reginald has advised us his late father Captain Stan Bonney, had thirty plus years as a Merchant sailor on the Australian coast, as well as six months as a civilian on contract to the US Army Small Ships during the dark days of 1942-43.



**PHOTOGRAPH: “Base troops in South Australia being training on a water-cooled Vickers .303 machine gun” - 143 Pte. Gordon Mills is 3rd from the right in spectacles, kneeling behind the barrel of the gun produced by Vickers Limited, a company heavily involved in the manufacture of aircraft and armaments during the early 20th-Century. [Typically this machine gun required a six to eight-man team to operate and had a great reputation for reliability and efficiency, and played havoc during the Great War among combatants who were bogged down in bloody trench warfare from fixed positions].**

He believes the remains of the missing at Fromelles were only hastily buried and warrant full recovery, in the knowledge that their final resting place is still to be determined.



**PHOTOGRAPH: Reserve Forces Day March, Sydney, New South Wales, 2005** - Having carried the RAN Banner on ANZAC Day and RFD marches since 2002, Reginald Bonney is depicted here in the State Banner Party. [Picture courtesy of R. G. Bonney, June 2008].

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*Ingleburn Army Camp was one of Australia's principal military facilities from 1939 until the 1970's and is now considered a site of national heritage significance, having played a crucial training role in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and for the duration of the National Service Scheme introduced from 1951 until it was abolished in 1972.*

Further information on the Ingleburn Army Camp, which is now listed on the Register of the National Estate, can be found on the Register of War Memorials in New South Wales at

<http://www.warmemorialsnsw.asn.au/Details.cfm?MemNo=438>, and Aussie Heritage at <http://www.aussieheritage.com.au/listings/nsw/Ingleburn%20Village/IngleburnArmyCamp/5211>.

Biographical information about Roger Freeman can be found on the Fly Leaf of the book *Second To None*, while an article in the 'Hawkesbury Gazette' last January referred to Dr. King as a writer, film maker and explorer, and a direct descendant of early Governor, Gidley King. Further background on Philip Gidley King can be found in the online edition of the Australian Dictionary of Biography if one is interested.