



William James Guthrie – 1916



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My ANZAC experience 2012

BY WILLIAM GUTHRIE

Long have I wanted to visit the many famous battlefields of World War I and to see what is left as time has moved on since those turbulent years. I also had a grandfather who served over there during the 'war to end all wars' and, although I never knew him – and, more regrettably, never got to talk to him about his experiences – when a work opportunity in France came up, I grabbed it. It was no ordinary work opportunity, though. As a member of the 1st Joint Public Affairs Unit (1JPAU), this job would see me in uniform, on duty, on Anzac Day, on Flanders fields – and just maybe, walking in my grandfather's footsteps.

Having never known my grandfather or where exactly he served, it was no less a privilege to be working on Anzac Day in the very country where he once bravely fought – and all the more poignant because he died on Anzac Day 1957, from lingering wounds inflicted by mustard gas.

William James Guthrie joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) 46 years to the day before I was born. Enlisting on 1 February 1916 at the tender age of 22, he initially joined the 5th Divisional Ammunition Column as a driver in the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery, better known then as the RFA (Royal Field Artillery). He was later transferred to the 1st Divisional Ammunition Column, 1st (Australian) Brigade.

After enlisting with his mates from Goulburn, NSW, he entered the war 12 months later, around the time the Canadian's swept the strongly dug-in Germans away in the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Having joined after 1915 – after the war was well underway – my grandfather and his comrades were dubbed the 'fair dinkums', a phrase coined at the time to reflect the fact they had their eyes wide open at enlistment and knew well what was waiting for them in Europe. The fair dinkums were sent to France to fight Germany on the Western Front, the name the Germans gave to a series of trenches that ran 700km from the Belgian coast to the Swiss border.