

Ballarat Chinese ANZACs

During the years from 1850 to 1880, Australia was the centre of the greatest gold rush the world had ever seen with gold miners from the over the world, including the Chinese, joining this rush. They arrived by boats in the hundreds and thus, a large number of Chinese miners began to seek their fortune on the Goldfields.

These Chinese miners were mostly from the British Colony of Hong Kong and landed in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide and later in Robe. Near 20 thousand Chinese landed in Robe (South Australia) and walked more than 500 km overland to the Victoria goldfields to avoid the "Ten Pounds Pull Tax" imposed on all Chinese in 1855 by the then Victoria Government.

Chinese miners were looked down by Europeans as an inferior race and were treated as such. Interestingly though, Chinese diggers looked down the Europeans as an inferior race and seldom adopted European manners of living. Chinese believed that they were a superior race from the civilized "Middle Kingdom" while the Europeans were still in the Cave Age.

With the passing of the gold rushes, most Chinese returned home, some with great riches but many with little more than they left with. Of those who did not return home, some could not afford to do so while others saw a future for themselves in this country and stayed on. Some of those who remained in Australia became an integral part of their communities. Descendants of the original Chinese gold miners and later immigrants are now included in every section of Australian society. Their contribution to Australian society is highly valued with many of them now found in high places in government, medicine and business.

Among the thousands Chinese miners and their descendants, there are individuals with all manner of trades. One such group is particularly highly mentionable because during the World War One, there were hundreds or even thousands Chinese and their descendants who joined Australian Imperial Forces, (thus becoming an ANZAC Digger) and fought in Gallipoli, Western Front, Mid East and elsewhere. These brave man and women showed the same courage and selflessness as any other man or woman from every part of this great country. Some even sacrificed their life for the country they now called home. Truly, they had become an integral part of this country.

There were more than twenty Ballarat Chinese descendants who enlisted in the AIF, and here are some stories should be sharing with wide range communities.

Three brothers Albert Edward LEPP (SN 4539), Reginald Charles LEPP (SN 4540) and Arthur Norman LEPP (SN 1938) from Humffray Street, Ballarat East.

Albert Edward LEPP, 23 years old, was enlisted on 9th July 1915. Joined 58th Battalion and missing in the infamous Battle of Fromelles, late confirmed killed in action on the 19th July 1916. Albert was buried at Ration Farm Military Cemetery in Belgium.

Reginald Charles LEPP, 21 years old, enlisted just 3 days after his brother Albert served with 8th Battalion. He was wounded in action on May 1916 with a gunshot wound to his hand. He was wounded again on 27th April 1918, sustaining severe shell wounds to his left leg and foot. He was disembarked at Melbourne on New Year's Day 1919 with a tag "medically unfit – shell wound left thigh".

Arthur Norman LEPP, 19 years old, enlisted on the 1st Feb 1916, served in France with the 39th Battalion. He suffered gas poisoning in June 1917, returned home in Nov 1917, classed as being medically unfit for active service.

Another three brothers Clarence Rupert LEPP (SN 2199), Victor Stanley LEPP (SN 1576) and James Edwin LEPP (SN 2198) hailed from Young Street, Ballarat East. Clarence, Victor and James were the cousins to Albert, Reginald and Arthur.

Clarence Rupert LEPP, 20 years old, enlisted in mid July 1915 joined with the 24th Battalion. He suffered a gunshot wound to his thigh in France, he received the Military Medal for great gallantry and endurance in carrying messages and acting as guide under heavy fire, often in the open at Pozieres on the 26th August 1916. In addition to carrying his messages promptly, he rendered valuable work by giving verbal reports of his own observations." In August 1918 he was wounded again in action by a shell wound to the back. He returned to Australia in March 1919.

Victor Stanley LEPP, 22 years old, enlisted on the 9th April 1915 and serving with 21st Battalion, he was killed in action on 26th August 1916. His body was never recovered and he is commemorated on the Australian Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, France.

James Edwin LEPP, 29 years old, was enlisted in mid July 1915 and commenced serving with 24th Battalion. He later served with the 1st Anzac Entrenching Battalion. He returned to home on 22nd May 1919, having come through the war without major injury or illness. It could be that he was protected by the army forces due to the extent of death and severe wounding among his brothers and cousins. James Edwin LEPP died in Oct 1966 aged 80.

Albert, Reginald and Arthur LEPP's parents are: George E LEPP and Margaret LEPP (nee Hinyee).

James, Victor and Clarence LEPP's parents are: James Henry LEPP and Emma Dinah LEPP (nee Ah Foon).

Interestingly Ernest SING (SN 745) who was also the cousin to LEPPs as Ernest SING's mother was Clara SING (nee Ah Foon) who was the sister of James, Victor and Clarence LEPP's mother Emma LEPP (nee Ah Foon).

Ernest Percival SING, 23 years old from Main Street, Ballarat, enlisted on 8th July 1915, joined 31st Battalion for the battlefields of Europe, moved to France in June 1916 then transferred to the 5th Division Signals Company, he was wounded and gassed on 16th May 1918, returned home on 11th May 1919. He died in June 1937 aged 44.

"If Australia is good enough to live in, it is good enough to fight for" – Benjamin Moy LING (Chinese ANZAC).

Charles Zhang