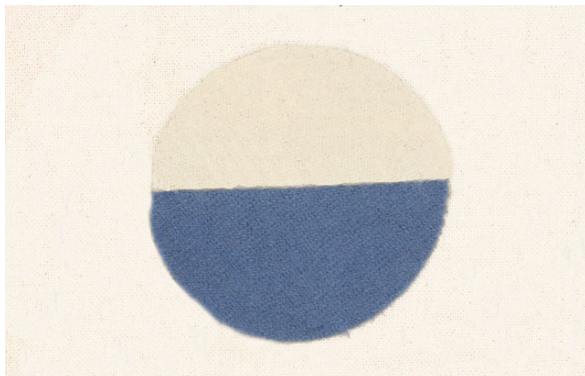


# George Henry Spinks

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1891, George Henry Spinks was born into a Penguin family of 5. George was the middle child of an older sister and younger brother, and lived with his mother Rachel Spinks and father Charles Spinks, whom George was very close with. He attended a local school in the Penguin district in his youth and loved the area. When he was only seven years old, George's ten-year-old sister, Elvie, suffered a heart condition and passed away. Naturally, this was a difficult time for the grief-stricken family and George looked to his religious connections to guide him through such an arduous period. As he grew up, he became an increasingly devout Christian and something of an icon for positivity in the Penguin community, and, at age 16, George officially converted in Penguin's Methodist Church (now the Uniting Church). This was not long before he began working with his father, Charles Spinks, as a baker – a job which he stuck with for several years. George continued to deepen his religious connection by becoming a Sunday School teacher and later a prestigious preacher for the Gospel. In 1910, aged 19, George led a Gospel band of his own and sang songs for his locale. At some point he also met his eventual wife Bertha, whom took the surname of Spinks after their marriage.

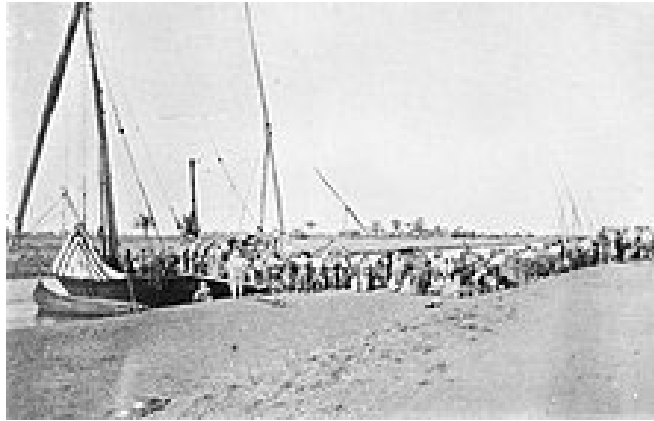


In 1914, WWI began, and on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, Australia joined the war effort with the British. It was not until January 4<sup>th</sup> of 1916, however that Spinks was able to and decided to enlist. On this day, he was 24 years and 6 months old, 5 feet and 7 inches tall (1.7m) and had brown eyes and hair. Upon successful enlistment as a private, George joined the 12<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion as part of a group of reinforcements. Said group was mostly Tasmanians, accompanied by Western Australians. 50% of the 1000 troops were veterans, whereas the others were new to such conflict, not unlike George. From here, the soldiers convened in mainland Australia, for a long period of training, after which George returned to Penguin for a farewell service. He took the chance to say goodbye to his family and Bertha, along with his fellow Penguin soldiers. After the service, the men left for Tel El Kebir in Egypt, where they would spend a great deal of their time training. A long journey by ship was ahead for the 12<sup>th</sup>'s reinforcements, and George used this time to help where he could. He sang



in Bible class, supported those who needed it, and generally boosted morale. Through his actions, he not only became a highly regarded man in his battalion (similarly to his reputation back home), but also made some very close friends. One such friend being the ship's chaplain, Father James A. Gault. James recognised George as an exceptionally kind figure on the ship, particularly in regards to his religious efforts.

When they arrived in Egypt, the 12<sup>th</sup> reinforcements officially formed their own battalion, the 52<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion. This action was part of a process labelled as “Doubling the AIF,” and was enacted on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1916. This new battalion was denoted by the colour patch pictured above, the circle shape indicating the 4<sup>th</sup> Division and the blue semicircle meaning the 52<sup>nd</sup> was the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion under the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. The 52<sup>nd</sup> can be seen arriving in Egypt to the right.



Upon his arrival in Egypt, George decided to write to his former choir teacher in Penguin and thanked him for the role he played in shaping who Spinks would become. The reverend James Gault also wrote to Spinks’ father Charles in Egypt, writing the following:

*“Just a few lines of appreciation of the splendid help your boy has given me both on board ship and in the camp. His beautiful face and yet more beautiful spirit draws everyone to him. His singing is much appreciated, and his help in the Bible class was very great. You may well be proud of your boy; to me he has become a very dear friend.”*

Note that the “*help in the camp,*” that Gault mentions involved singing songs for his battalion and practicing conversions. George had been recorded as openly converting 15 soldiers after a single session. Once the battalion’s training in Tel El Kebir was complete, they travelled northwest to Alexandria where they departed via the transport ship HMT Ivernia to Marseilles in France. Such a voyage took about a week, and upon their arrival in Marseilles they soon after travelled to Pozieres and Mouquet Farm through railway. The battalion’s role at Mouquet Farm was a support-focused one, supplying the working parties at the trench front lines during August with ammo, rations, etc. At this time, when George was serving a support role, George took a shell wound and was taken away from the battlefield on a stretcher. This was on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1916, removing him from his battalion until he recovered a short time after. After his recovery, George continued his support role until the 52<sup>nd</sup> were to become a part of their first major battle, one against Mouquet Farm. This campaign was to commence in early September, aiming to finally retake Mouquet Farm from its German captors. On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, this attack officially began, and George took his first offensive role in battle, charging the German frontline alongside his fellow 52<sup>nd</sup> troops. It was shortly after the beginning of the attack on Mouquet Farm that George was struck by a high-calibre shell and crippled, stuck inside of the hole which had formed. Several eye-witnesses described the brutality of the attack and George’s injuries. At this point, a private Rumsheiw spotted Spinks in the shell hole, and naturally sought to help him, despite its distance into no man’s land. When Rumsheiw made it to George’s side, he noticed that he was terribly wounded, collapsed in the shell hole. In his last recorded words, George said to Rumsheiw, “I’m gone. There is no hope for me.” The private was forced to leave George to continue the battalion’s advancements. Another soldier, a Richard Barness, who was a close friend with George in his battalion, noticed the young soldier when he was coming back from the September 3<sup>rd</sup> charge wounded. He saw that George was barely conscious, but now in little pain, and realised that his mate was not going to survive. Barness made George comfortable, taking off his equipment and lying him down to rest. George Spinks would have died on his own in that hole, aged 25.

After George's death, the attack on Mouquet Farm continued for several months, a bleak battle against a fortified German position in the farm's stone cellars. It took many, many reinforcements and over 11,000 casualties before Mouquet Farm was captured from German forces, leaving the farm as nothing but rubble in the aftermath. Now, the attack is generally viewed as a disastrous one, being gravely misjudged at the time.

George was buried at the Courcellette cemetery, only a few kilometres from Mouquet Farm. Reports said that there was little left of him to bury. Once James Gault had received news of George's death in France, he spent a considerable amount of time organising letters and information to be sent to his family in Penguin through the Red Cross. The reverend himself wrote to members of George's family and took care in providing information to George's now widow, Bertha Spinks. George Henry Spinks is now commemorated (right) at the cenotaph of his hometown Penguin, which Gault described as George's "own special place."

