

PRIVATE CHARLES CHICK

Service Number 1699



28.07.1890 – 18.03.1918

Charles William Chick was a second-generation Tasmanian, the second of Edwin Arthur and Susan Charlotte Chick's twelve children, he was born on the 28 July 1890. The Methodist Chick family originated from London, with Charley's, as known to his family and friends, grandfather immigrating to Van Diemen's Land as a child. Born and raised in rural Lilydale, the Chick family worked in agricultural labour, with Charley being no exception to this, working on Edwin's (his eldest brother) property as a farm labourer and orchardist. He worked there until leaving to fight in World War One aged 25, along with two more of the Chick family sons.



One of Charley's brothers, Peter Chadwick, enlisted just one month after war broke out at 21 years of age and was among the first at Gallipoli and Lone Pine. Peter was among the first troops to leave for World War 1 from Tasmania in 1914 and rode on Simpson's Donkey while injured. Charley attempted to follow in his brother's footsteps in order to fill what he saw as his duty to the nation. However, Charley was only 5'2" meaning that he did not meet the height requirements set in 1914. In 1916 one of Charley's younger brothers, Clifford Henry aged 18, also enlisted as a driver for the 15th Field Company Engineers. It is possible that this inspired Charley to try again, as on the 25 March 1916, Charley was successful in enlisting to Company B, 40th Australian Infantry Battalion, 1st Reinforcements, passing the height requirement as it had been lowered to 5'2" the year before.



CHICK Brothers (From Left) – Charles William, Peter Chadwick and Clifford

On the 1 July 1916, three months after enlisting in Claremont, Tasmania, Charley embarked from Hobart to Salisbury Plains in England on the HMAT A35 Berrima. The troops stayed there from September to November training primarily on rifle ranges. While there, Charley used some of the free time he had accumulated to holiday in Bristol for a few days. While in Bristol Charley met an 18 year-old-girl, Ruby Ashley, who showed him around the town. Although he embarked from England to the Western Front not long after the two remained in contact, exchanging letters quite frequently throughout the War.



Charles Chick (bottom right) and others in the 40th Battalion

In December of 1916, the 40th Battalion moved to France, where they were situated for the majority of the war, locked in trench warfare at Flanders. On the 10 December, young Charley wrote home to his mother and told a little of his experience in the fighting:

“I was under fire for a few days and it wasn’t half bad, the shells bursting just put me in the mind of blowing stumps out.”

At this time, Charley was yet to have fired a single shot at the enemy. But, to have retained apparent peace of mind during this time is extraordinary. Perhaps he was trying to convince his mother that all was well, or he was genuinely comfortable surrounded by these sounds, so similar to those he inflicted upon trees himself. However, just 22 days later his sentiments changed:

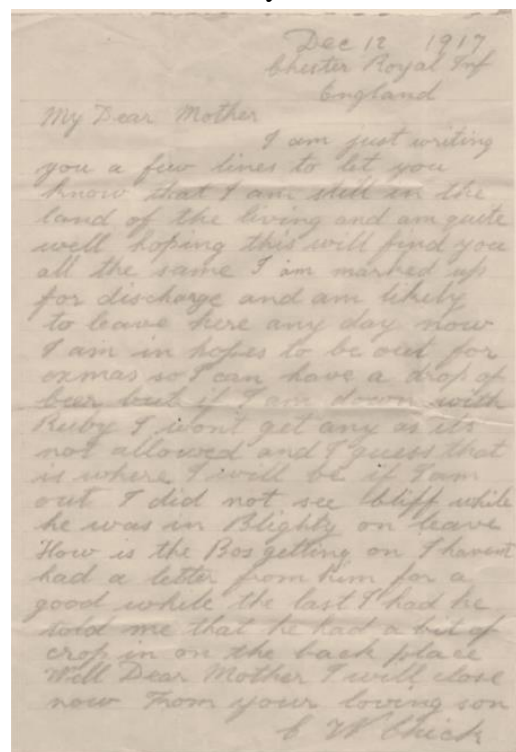
“They started to throw shells at us by the dozen and I thought the end had come for me. I was nearly smothered with mud which was thrown over us by the shells. I was shaking in my shoes but came out without a scratch.”

By this point he seemed to have lost the reminders of home within the sounds of the shells, bearing witness to the realities of what the sounds represented. Pain. Destruction. Death.

Although Charley stated many times how unenjoyable he found writing letters, it seems he was in constant correspondence with his brothers Peter and Cliff. Due to the brothers being in separate battalions, it was not often that they were posted to the same spot on the Western Front. In Charley's letters to his mother, he often mentions hearing about his brothers from people he had met in the hopes of reuniting with them. In September 1916, it appears that Peter and Cliff were able to reconnect in person before Charley had finished training in England. There are, however, rumours in the family today that the three brothers did track each other down while on the fields and managed to get a photo together, though no proof of such has been found.

Charley also corresponded with his brother Edwin back in Tasmania. Often, Charley would write in urgency, imploring with his older brother to not enlist in the War and encouraging him to "tie the knot" regardless of his brothers' absences. The family would have faced a dire lack of income if the orchard was left unattended, and if the four eldest boys were all killed. Going against Charley's warnings, Edwin persisted with the enlistment process, going through the medical examination. However, he must have heeded Charley's advice eventually, as he never left for the war, but married Everlyen Dennis on the 24 July 1918 in Perth, Tasmania.

In March 1917, Charley wrote to his mother further about the girl from Bristol. Every week he received a letter from Ruby, occasionally containing a packet of cigarettes. Only four months after meeting Ruby does he tell his mother: "If nothing happens to either of us, I guess there will be two coming home



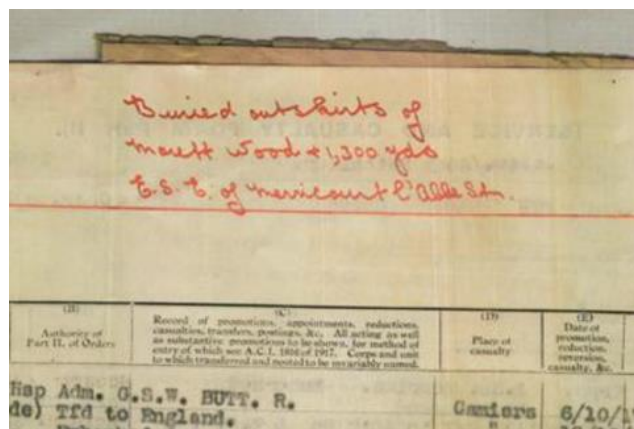
A letter from Charley to his mother

instead of one.” Alerting his mother to possible plans of marriage to his tour guide from Bristol.

On the 15 June 1917, Charley was shot in the left side of his chest in Messines, France. This was classified as a serious injury and required him to be sent to hospital in England for two months. He made a full recovery and re-joined his battalion on the 24 August. Less than two months later, on 6 October, he was shot again and was wounded, alongside 6,500 casualties, in the Battle of Broodseinde Ridge near Ypres in Belgium. He was wounded in the buttocks and thigh, because of such Charley was admitted to hospital to recuperate from his injuries in England, until he re-joined the troops for the final time on the 23 February 1918. While recovering from his injuries Charley reunited with Ruby.

In 1918 the 40th Battalion began fighting in Somme, France, and in March they began fighting in the Battle of Morlancourt, with the backdrop of the German Spring Offensive. The battle was punctuated with a constant stream of blood flowing from all sides of the war. Both the 40th and 41st Battalions fought alongside one and other, regardless of the conflicting orders each battalion received. Here is where I believe Charley met his untimely death when hit by a shell on the first day of the First Battle of Morlancourt, when he and of his compatriots faced heavy machine gun and artillery fire, with 150 fatalities, on the 28 March 1918 . There is much conflicting

information surrounding the place of Charley’s passing. Although there is no record of him having a grave, scrawled atop some of Charley’s records is a message, possibly reading: “Buried Outskirts of [indiscernible] Woods, 1300 yards E.S.T. of Méricourt L’Abbe”.



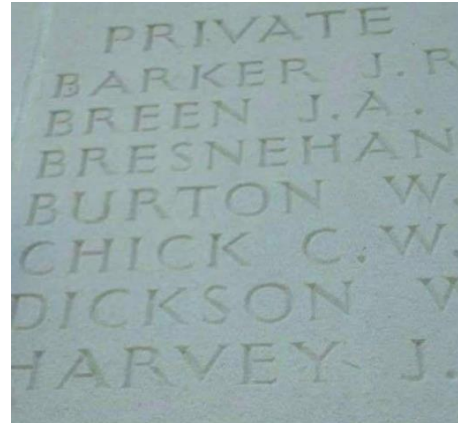
A note made atop of one of Charles Chick’s official documents.

The official documentation announced Charley’s death to have occurred at Méricourt as well, despite the 40th Battalion serving at Morlancourt, 69km away. Therefore, it is impossible to truly pinpoint where he was killed and is buried with such tenuous information.

He is commemorated in the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, France and panel 132 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial. Charley is also remembered at the Lilydale World War One Memorial in Tasmania, that was erected in 2018.



Charles Chick's name on the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial

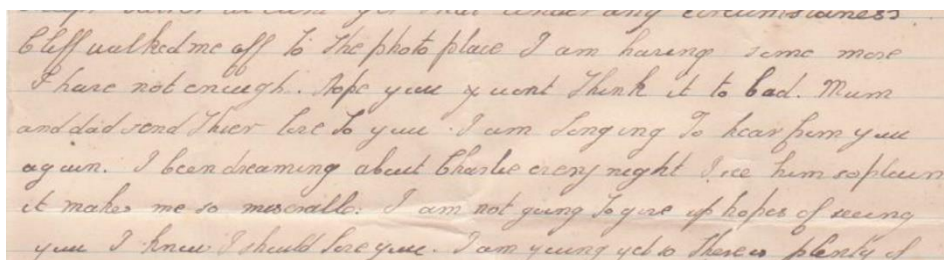


Charles Chick's name on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial

Aged only 28, Charley's life was cut immeasurably short, he was awarded the Victory Medal and British War Medal for his services during World War One. His mother received a Memorial Scroll and a Memorial Plaque (known as the Dead Man's Penny) in memory of her son, as all next of kin in Australia received when their soldier died during the Great War.

Regretfully without their brother, Clifford and Peter both returned home. However, in 1921, Clifford died when he was involved in a motorcycle accident. Peter went on to marry, have six children and, continued to reside in Lilydale until his death in 1973 at the age of 80.

Ruby, whom Charley had plans to bring home and marry, kept in contact with Charley's mother and brothers for some time after the war ended, mourning Charley's death and maintaining a relationship. In the letters that have been saved by Charley's family, she only mentions "[her] Charley" directly once, but rather she discusses the visits she received from Peter and particularly Cliff during and after the war ended. In doing so she focused on what



Excerpt of letter dated 28 April 1919, from Ruby Ashely to Charley's mother.

she could still hold on to, avoiding the loneliness that she admits to feeling without Charley. In 1929 however, Ruby married Edward Greenaway, a builder from Wales, and in doing so they moved from England to Wales.

Noreena, one of Charley's closest sisters, mourned the death of her brother deeply and for her entire life. When she bore a child ten years to the day after Charley Chick's passing, she named her child Charlie. He served as a living embodiment of his deceased uncle whom he was much like, extending the legacy of Charley Chick past his own existence.

The story of my Great Great Great Uncle Charley Chick holds a special place in my heart. Prior to beginning this study, Charley Chick was just a distant relative to me, however through research and tracing his past I feel I have been brought so much closer to him, and the rest of the Chick family. This has opened my eyes further to how unfathomable the figures are when so many lives were cut tragically short during World War One. 60, 000 Australian deaths, 60, 000 stories much like Charley's, each contributing to the utter devastation and destruction left in the wake of the Great War, as well as the mysteries and uncertainty so many families faced when tracing lost brothers, sisters, fathers, sons, daughters and friends. Stories like Charley's are important for us to remember, to cherish, to remind us what is precious – life and freedom and how easily they can both disappear. We need to remember the bravery, the hopes that they all had for us and ensure we strive to honour their memories. I wish to extend my gratitude to all the relations of Charley who contributed greatly to the construction of such a moving story, and in attempt to fill the holes lost to the past and the devastation.



Lilydale World War One Memorial