

# Premier's Anzac Spirit School Prize

Archie McEwen

Not often do you see a man who gives everything in the field, and yet more in the air. Not often does a man grace the beaches of Gallipoli and the clouds over France.

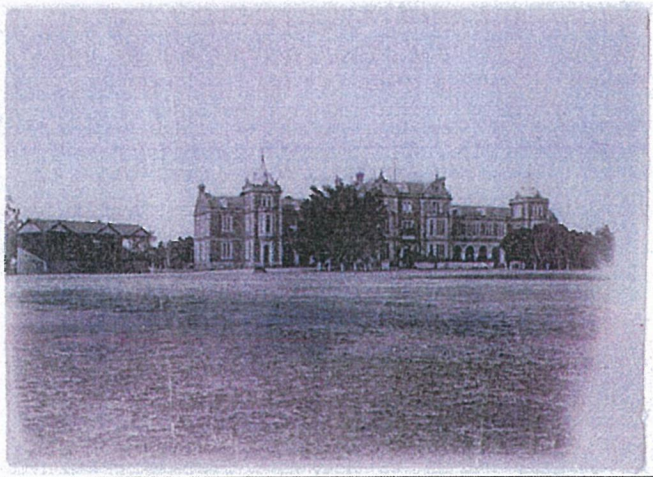
"Fight on and fly on to the last drop of blood and the last drop of fuel, to the last beat of the heart."

**-Manfred von Richthofen**



Figure 1. John Godlee in his RFC uniform. He was a striking young man. (Virtual War Memorial.)

On a damp, grey night, not too dissimilar to the weather of colonial Australia's motherland; England, a child was born. An Australian hero was born. It was the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1891, when John Godlee was born to Mr Theo. Godlee and Mrs Godlee, in a small house in St Peters, Adelaide. He was to be an only child. At just 11, John began his schooling at the relatively young Prince Alfred College, where he would study under Mr Frederic Chapple.



John adored sport. He played for the third and second eleven cricket teams and was written up in the College's 1908 chronicles as having an average batting score of 21 and top scoring with 44. (PAC Chronicles 1908.) So he wasn't unbelievable at it... But it didn't detract from his passion. In his final years, with the threat of war still entirely fictional, John passed in history, Latin, algebra, and geometry, as well as English history, English literature, and French. An eager, handsome John was quick to gain entry into the School of Mines. He had distinctive short, cleanly shaven hair and a kind face, serious and smart but ultimately

compassionate.

Figure 2. Prince Alfred College in 1910- 2 years after Godlee graduated. (State Library.)

For two, long, arduous years, John essentially disappeared from all accounts; he moved to a station in the North to receive his wool classing qualifications. Although there are almost no written records of John's life during these years, the NT Government writes about this early pastoralism; "In the early stages it was often a story of physical and financial hardship, tremendous isolation, poor country, and scarce white labour." John was then successfully accepted to work as a stockman at a station in the North Western districts of Western Australia. It is around this time that Australia began to wake to the looming threat of global tyranny; a world war.

On August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1914, the newly federated Australia promised the British Empire over 20 000 men, and John wasn't missing out. His enemy; the newly formed alliance of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Travelling to Guilford, WA, he enlisted just two months later, leaving Fremantle as a trooper in the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment, aged 23.

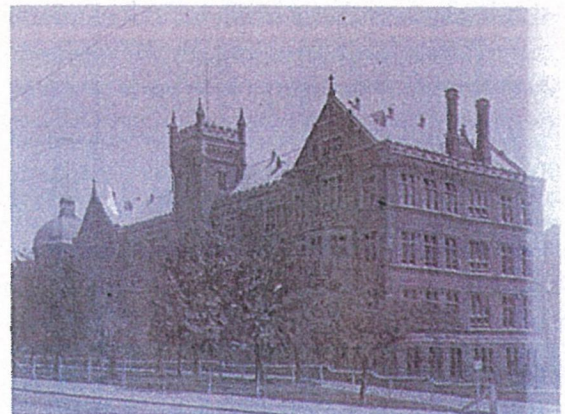


Figure 3. South Australia's 'School of the Mines' North Terrace, Adelaide, in 1910; where Godlee received his wool-classing qualifications. (State Library.)



In early February 1915, after local training in Australia, John departed for Egypt onboard HMAT A47 Mashobra, a medium sized passenger ship capable of carrying 66 first class passengers. (Birtwistle Wiki) John was trained in preparation for a land-based campaign targeting Turkey, "Intended to allow Allied ships to pass through the Dardanelles," and ultimately "Capture Constantinople (Now Istanbul.)" (Imperial War Museum). In May of the same year, an Australian stockman found himself in a country he'd never been to, fighting for an Empire he'd never been to, for a reason only comprehended by the world's most superior politicians.



Figure 4. HMAT A47 Mashobra, capable of housing 66 passengers, one being John Godlee. (Birtwistle Wiki, 2020)

The conditions at Gallipoli were not pleasant for the men. Although not as commonly known, the constant sound of shell fire kept many soldiers awake and caused psychological trauma, as well as severe fatigue. The men were provided with very poor nutrition, such as the famously hated 'bully beef' and rock hard 'ANZAC biscuits.' (The Conversation, 2015) This lack of nutrition in turn caused a large increase in disease. These included dysentery, tetanus, and septic wounds. Water was limited and caused dehydration as well as a lack of hygiene.

Unfortunately, like many other men who fought at Gallipoli, John's intentions were to do the best for his country, and not to record everything for historical benefit. The following information is based on the

service of his regiment and other men based at Gallipoli. Despite being a light horse regiment, the men of the 10<sup>th</sup> regiment found themselves working as infantrymen at Quinn's Post and Pope's Hill, as a defensive unit. The Australian War Memorial describes Quinn's Post as "The most advanced post of the ANZAC line." It provided a crucial location from which to attack and defend from.



Figure 5. A view of Pope's Hill, July 1915 (Australian War Memorial, n.d.)

The most notable actions of the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment at Gallipoli include the notorious charging of the Nek, made famous through its portrayal in the 1981 film, 'Gallipoli.' The Nek was a steep ridge, strategically useful as a distraction from a main attack planned later in August. Despite last ditch attempts to call off the attack, the 8<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment went first, being quickly decimated by machine guns, many "killed just metres out of the trench." (Australian War Memorial.) Charles Bean, an official Australian historian wrote of the 10<sup>th</sup>'s involvement, "The 10<sup>th</sup> went forward to meet death instantly... the men running swiftly and as straight as they could at the Turkish rifles." The final death toll of the attack was 234 for not one metre of ground gained. It was a major failure.



Figure 6. Godlee's enemy; Turkish troops marching to their post at Gallipoli, 1914-15 (The Age, 2015)



Godlee's time at Gallipoli ended when he fell ill with enteric fever. He had been promoted to corporal, and survived roughly 4 months in battle. As his sickness worsened, he was evacuated back to Malta on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August. After just 9 days, he was transported back to England aboard HS Franconia, an 18 000-tonne converted troop ship. He spent his time recovering at No 4 London General Hospital at Denmark Hill. Godlee was awarded the 1914-15 Star to recognise his efforts against the Ottoman Empire. As he began to recover, he was formally discharged from the AIF on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, and just one day later was granted commission as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC.)

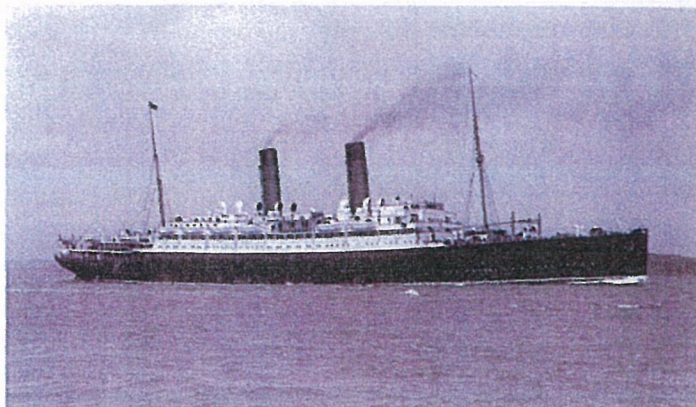


Figure 7. HS Franconia in 1910, before its conversion into a troop ship. Godlee was transported from Malta to England on this ship. (Wikipedia, n.d.)

Aircraft technology was still in its early stages, and as a result training was extremely dangerous. Pilot Frederic Barr Shaw recorded that there were "an average of three crashes a day," many fatal. "You will report to Air Ministry in service dress, drill order. Shoes, coloured scarves, fur collars and other irregular dress will not be worn in public at any time, whether on duty or on leave..." These were typical orders given to newly entered RFC members. Beginning with ground school, Godlee had to attend the School of Military Aeronautics for 4 weeks to learn about aerial observation, wireless telegraphy, engine mechanics,

and more. However many men considered this training to be useless for practical application. A typical day began with a six o'clock wake up call, breakfast, and then a parade from barracks. (The Aerodrome, 1998) Moving to Gosport, he then had to achieve 15 hours of solo flight, flying in Maurice Farman MF.11's, Avro 504's, and Airco DH2's. Dual flights took place under 1000 feet within sight of the aerodrome for safety precautions. Each solo flight was 15-20 minutes long.



Figure 8. No.32 Squadron standing in front of a DH2 on the Wester Front, 1916. Godlee could very well be in this photograph. (Wikimedia, n.d.)

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1916, John Godlee graduated as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Flying Officer and was moved to France to begin his service with No.32<sup>nd</sup> Squadron. Equipped with Airco DH.2s, the squadron began to fly patrols over the Western front. These aircraft were fitted with Gnôme Monosoupape 100 HP rotary engines, forward firing .303 Lewis machine guns, and were "very manoeuvrable and easy to fly." (Bae Systems, n.d.) They could reach a maximum speed of 150 km/h, fly to an altitude of 14 000 ft, and last in the air for up to 2 hours and 45 minutes. Godlee would fly over the Somme, Arras, Bethune... On the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, while flying in a DH2, Godlee took part in a patrol with his own squadron and members of No.25 Squadron flying FE 2bs.



Figure 9. The No.32 Squadron logo after its conversion from the RFC to the RAF. (Wikipedia, n.d.)



At 6:30 am, the group of allied aircraft engaged with multiple German 'Fokkers,' and one was seen 'going down after losing a wing.' (The Aerodrome, 2018) Officially, an FE 2b crew were credited with the attack, however most pilots present believed it was Godlee, who could not make a report due to injuries. Achieving a 'kill' in these simple aircraft was near impossible, yet Godlee had managed to do so. The Fokker crashed near an airfield at Provin, killing its pilot, Vzfw Otto Dapper, a 25-year-old from Meissen.



Figure 10. "A DH2 Similar to that in which Godlee was killed in." -Published in the South Australian Aviation Museum's monthly newsletter.

Sadly, the heroic story of John Godlee ends with death. Just four days after this unofficial aerial, Godlee was flying an escort patrol when he was attacked by two Fokker Eindeckers. His aircraft was badly damaged, and he crashed West of the lines. Three days later, aged just 24 years, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant John Godlee was pronounced dead from his injuries. His commanding officer wrote of the incident, "Lieutenant

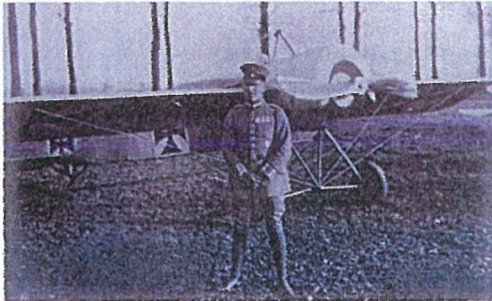


Figure 11. A Fokker Eindecker; the type of plane that shot Godlee down. Note the early monoplane design. (Ares Games, 2018)

Godlee fell in our lines and was alive, although unconscious, when picked up, but died immediately on arrival at hospital. He died bravely for his country, and even on the morning that he met his death had done good work. His death leaves a gap in our squadron; in fact, in the Flying Corps, which will be hard to replace, for he was a most gallant and capable officer."

"Courage is doing what you are afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you are scared."  
-Edward Vernon Rickenbacker



Figure 12. Godlee's medals, including the 1914-15 star as seen on the left. (Virtual War Memorial, n.d.)



## Part B-

Perseverance and courage- one might argue that these qualities can be found in most humans. But through the dangers and circumstances that our ANZAC soldiers faced, it is clear that these values take a whole new meaning, and for John Godlee, this is no exception. In fact, it is hard enough to choose just two qualities for a man so keen on holding up a roof of safety for his family and for his country, a roof seemingly made of the heaviest steel.

John's display of perseverance began many years before World War 1. With his goal set on wool classing, he quickly entered 'The School of the Mines' and then moved not straight into a job, but to a station to finalise this education. In the early 1900's, education was not like it is now and most men would go straight into work after school. John Godlee however pushed on through these two experimental years to finally achieve his full qualifications. His perseverance was rewarded by his successful employment at a station, showing the value of his hard work and strong-willed mind.

I'm sure after researching Godlee that he would say that he was just doing what everyone else did, but there is no doubt at the outbreak of WWI Godlee's commitment to do the best job possible was special, heroic, and brave. After representing Australia at Gallipoli, day after day surviving shell after shell, bullet after bullet, Godlee was ready to give enough to go over the top at the Nek.

After falling ill, his recovery was not quick. It is likely being sent home with his illness may have been shameful to Godlee, but his duties were not over. He persevered to get over his illness, quickly enlisting in a whole new field of battle. Determined to honour his country and family to the highest possible limit, he was soon flying in the sky, only thirteen years after the first aeroplane was invented. Godlee's death symbolises the limit of his perseverance, his sacrifice; he would not stop until his heart was not beating. And he reached this limit, at age 24. At just 24, he gave his life for his country.

Clearly, by persevering through some of the harshest conditions known to man, John Godlee had a courageous heart. As written above, Edward Vernon Rickenbacker says that there 'can be no courage unless you are scared.' Godlee was an only child. He did not have brothers to look out for him through school. He was not with best mates when he joined the Light horse. He was alone when he fell ill, and he was alone when he joined the RFC. There is no doubt he would have been scared- petrified even. Using only his heart and his mind, Godlee was able to make some of the most courageous decisions, and for this he truly embodies the brave spirit of the ANZAC.

**RIP John Godlee, 1891-1916**



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