In the media
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News
Page: 16
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Digger’s life saved by cigarette case

Eugene Boisvert

A CIGARETTE tin Allen Peterie Fricker’s sister gave him when he left Adelaide for the battlefields of World War I is credited with saving his life in Belgium.

Fricker, who rose to the rank of sergeant in Australian Divison Signals Company by war’s end, first survived a fractured skull in Gallipoli a month after he was one of the first Anzacs to land on the shore.

Fragments from an exploded shell reportedly hit the Alberton carpenter in the forehead. In his diary, Fricker recalled the incident: “I was running along the beach at Anzac Cove and woke up a few days later in a hospital tent on Lemnos (a Greek island).”

After recovering, the then 22-year-old was sent to France and took part in the Battle of Pozieres and the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917.

According to his family, he was shot in the chest at Ypres, Belgium, but survived because he had a cigarette tin given to him by his sister, May, in his breast pocket.

According to official citations, Fricker was awarded a Meritorious Service Medal for being “conscientious and obliging in the performance of his duties and setting a splendid example to others”.

After the war, he took up a soldier’s settlement block in Walkerie but during the Great Depression returned to Adelaide to find work as a builder. He died in 1966 and is buried next to the artist Albert Namatjira in Alice Springs.

His son, Lyll Fricker, was a pilot in World War II before settling in Burnside with his wife Lourdes, now 92. Mrs Fricker said her father-in-law never talked about his time in the war and he would not give permission for his son’s urn to join in World War II — he got permission from his mother instead.

Mrs Fricker’s neighbour Caitlin Prentice, 16, recently did a school project on Allen Fricker.

“He was quite brave and so young, too,” Caitlin said.

Lourdes Fricker with neighbour Caitlin Prentice who did a school project on Sgt Allen Fricker.