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FEATURES

‘A pretty place’ – Kingston’s Lance Corporal Vin Dalton comes to Lemnos



Lemnian women spinning cotton, Lemnos, 1915. James Edward McPhee Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Jim Claven
12 January 2025 3:53pm

Sitting in Oakleigh’s Eaton Mall re
passing parade, I wondered how
connections to Greece that surro
thousands of non-Hellenic Austra

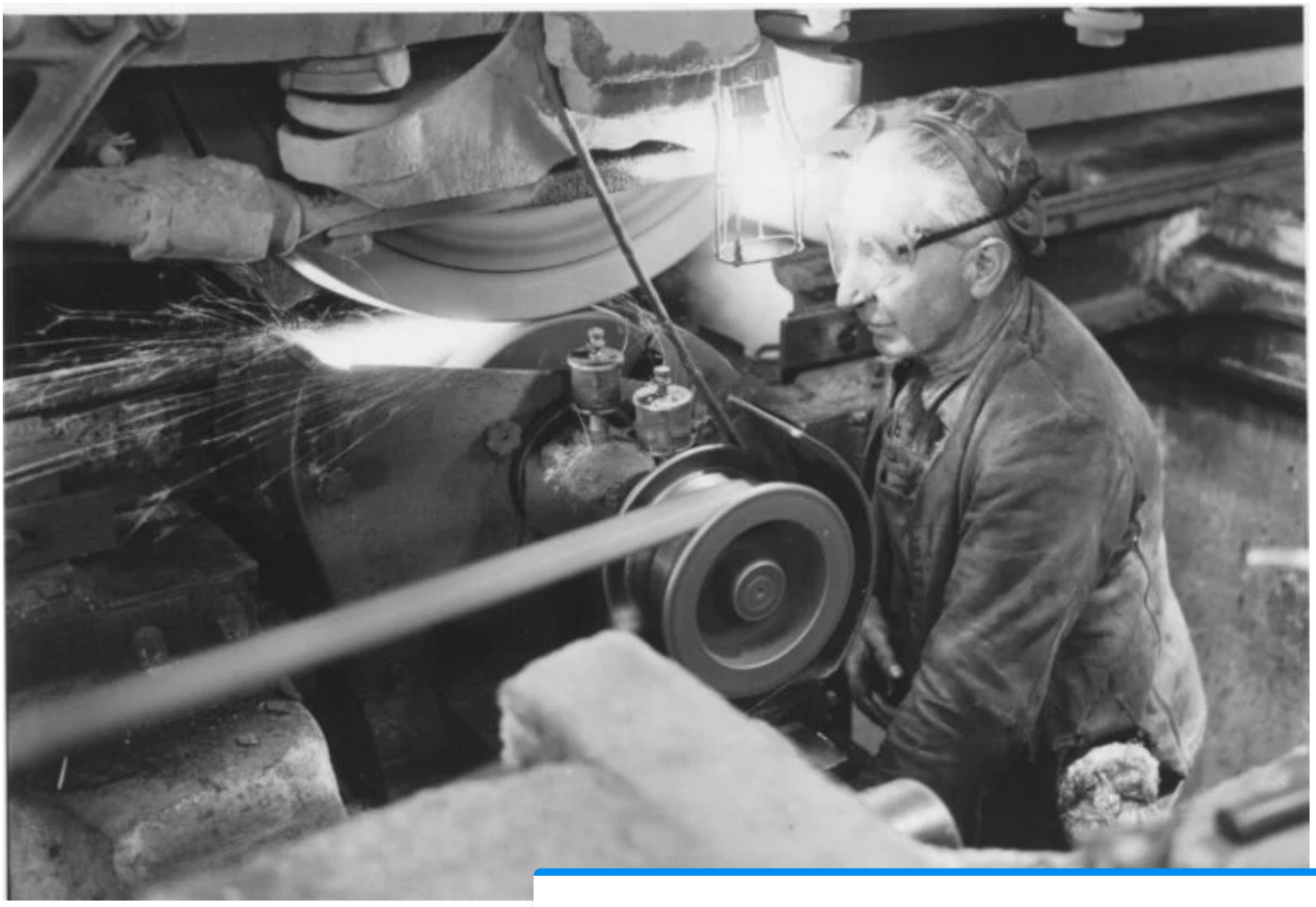
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once came to Greece as Anzacs across both world wars. Along with the many other nationalities who served in these campaigns who now call Australia home, we literally have tens of thousands – if not hundreds of thousands – of Australians of non-Hellenic heritage who have these personal family or friendship connections to Greece.

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I have met many of these people with their family stories of Greece, sometimes half-remembered and with little records, others with large and significant archives that I have assisted in their preservation, such as those of Private Syd Grant and Sergeant Alfred Huggins who both served in the Greek campaign of 1941. It was my good friend Dr Peter Ewer's faithful video recording of many veterans of this same campaign that ensured that our new documentary – Anzac The Greek Chapter – had such resonance across both the Australian Hellenic and the wider community as evidenced by the positive responses we received from its screenings.



Vin in later life back in Australia. Photo Ba

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I have also sought to recount the

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publications – Lemnos & Gallipoli Revealed, From Imbros Over The Sea and Grecian Adventure – emphasising how the Hellenic link to Australia's Anzac story connects peoples and communities in a very personal way. These can be traumatic stories of terrible loss and injury but also experiences of adventure and exhilaration as well as communal solidarity as these young Australians met with the support of local Greek civilians. They are also wartime experiences that were combined with military defeat, often over-shadowed by previous or subsequent campaigns, leading to the fading of their legacy for many not directly connected to them. I believe that this is why many react so positively to the re-telling of their stories.



Vin's daughters – Glenyce (left) and Joan (right) in November 2024. Photo Roger Dalton.

So I thought it was perfectly appropriate to suggest one of Eaton Mall's Greek cafes as the place for me to meet appreciated Australian Greek Dia Roger Dalton, enquiring about pu

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proffering some details of his grandfather Vincent or Vin Dalton who came to Lemnos in 1915. Like all of these encounters this was an exchange, a coming together, as I sought to learn about this young Australian's time on Lemnos and Roger sought more information as to how his family story fitted into the wider experience of Australians on Lemnos and Greece in WW1. It was an enjoyable and fruitful discussion sitting on one sunny afternoon in Oakleigh's Greek quarter.



Vin Dalton's Battalion on the day of their fateful assault at Krithia on the Gallipoli Peninsula. AWM

The following account of Vin's war and his time on Lemnos are drawn from this discussion, Vin's personal military records, his battalion war diaries and from a single letter that he wrote home to his aunt dated 24th July 1915 which was printed in his local newspaper the Ballarat Star. The publication by newspapers of such private communications from the front was a common occurrence at the time.

Born in Kingston, north of Ballara
working as a miner in a gold mine
August 1914, the month the war b

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E Company. They departed Melbourne aboard the troopship HMAT Benalla in October 1914, barely two months since they were formed.

After weeks of military training in the sands of Egypt, the Battalion departed Alexandria on 8th April heading north on a voyage that would take them to Lemnos and ultimately Gallipoli. As Vin wrote home the soldiers “had no idea as to where we were going, but there was some wild guessing.” He writes of how they sailed past several islands before arriving at a “small Greek Island called Lemnos”, the Battalion War Diary confirming their arrival in Mudros Bay on 11th April. As they sailed in Vin and his comrades would have seen the growing assembly of Allied vessels at anchor in the great bay.



Windmills and shepherds on Lemnos. Portianos, Lemnos, 1915-16. Florence Elizabeth James-Wallace collection. Photo: Albert W. Savage), Fryer Library, University of Queensland

The War Diary records that the B
April with practice at disembarka
letter home talks of the Battalion
town, presumably Mudros on the

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pretty place" and noted the windmills and spinning wheels to be seen onshore. These were the windmills that ground the islanders produce and the wheels from which the local women made their woollen garments and other products. These scenes can be seen in some of the photographs taken by other Australian soldiers who came to the Island. He doesn't mention it but Vin may also have interacted with the locals as other Australians did, purchasing some fresh produce from the sellers on their caiques in the harbour or in the village streets. Like many others Vin commented on Lemnos being "an old-fashioned place, and very much behind the times."

As a soldier of the 8th Battalion, Vin was amongst some of the first Australian troops to depart Mudros Bay, sailing around Lemnos on the evening of 24th April before finding temporary anchorage in its northern Pournia Bay, famed in Homer's Iliad. Aboard this flotilla was the Australian official correspondent Charles Bean. We know from his letter home that he was excited at the prospect of the coming landing. I wonder what he thought of the great Island of Imbros, as they sailed past this Island to the north-east of Lemnos before anchoring off its coast to prepare for the final journey to Anzac Cove.

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Original

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES.

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.

Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.

539

Name Vincent Michael Dalton

Unit 8th Bat Inf (A.I.F.)

Joined on 19 Aug 1914

Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.

What is your Name?	1. Vincent M. Dalton
In what Parish or near what Town were you born?	2. In the Parish of ____ in or near the Town of Kingston in the County of Talbot
Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject? (N.B.—If the latter, papers to be shown.)	3. Yes
What is your age?	4. 24 years
What is your trade or calling?	5. Miner
Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? If so, where, to whom, and for what period?	6. No.
Are you married?	7. No.
Who is your next of kin? (Address to be stated)	8. Uncle Michael Cleary Kingston 272 Dorcas St. St Kilda Melbourne
Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power?	9. No.
Have you ever been discharged from any part of His Majesty's Forces, with Ignominy, or as Incorrigible and Worthless, or on account of Conviction of Felony, or of a Sentence of Penal Servitude, or have you been dismissed with Disgrace from the Navy?	10. No.
Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in, His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy, or Colonial Forces? If so, state which, and if not now serving, state cause of discharge	11. No.
Have you stated the whole, if any, of your previous service?	12. Yes.
Have you ever been rejected as unfit for His Majesty's Service? If so, on what grounds?	13. No
(For married men and widowers with children)— Do you understand that no Separation Allowance will be issued to you either before or after embarkation during your term of service?	14.

I, Vincent Michael Dalton do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and I am willing and hereby voluntarily agree to serve in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

And I further agree to allot not less than two-fifths of the pay payable to me from time to time during my service for the support of my wife and children.*

Date 19/8/14

[illegible]/8.14.—G.10220. *This clause should be struck out in the

National Archives of Australia

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Vin Dalton's signed AIF attestation docum

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Vin would take part in the landings at Anzac Cove on the morning of 25th April, his letter home describing the ferocity and confusion of the fighting, “a day I will never forget as long as I live.” Ten days later the Battalion would take part in the disastrous second battle of Krithia. A photograph depicts the Battalion resting before the frontline a day or so before their attack as part of the Australian 2nd Brigade. The brigade sustained over 1000 casualties (killed, missing or wounded) during this battle. Vin’s account of his taking part in this “exciting charge” which “will never be beaten” is tempered by his description of his having been wounded and struggling back to the safety of his entrenchment. Vin and the Battalion would return to the front at Anzac Cove and take part in the battle of Lone Pine in early August.

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The troops fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula were beset with intestinal illnesses due to the poor sanitation conditions. Vin had his first bout of such illnesses in July, treated on the Peninsula and after 6 days returned to duty. After being promoted in the field to Lance Corporal on 27th July, Vin was again struck by illness on 25th August but this time he was sufficiently ill to be sent from the Peninsula for treatment. It is not clear if he came ashore for treatment at either Imbros or Lemnos but he was soon on his way for medical treatment at the Allied military hospitals on Malta. He would not return to Gallipoli or Lemnos.

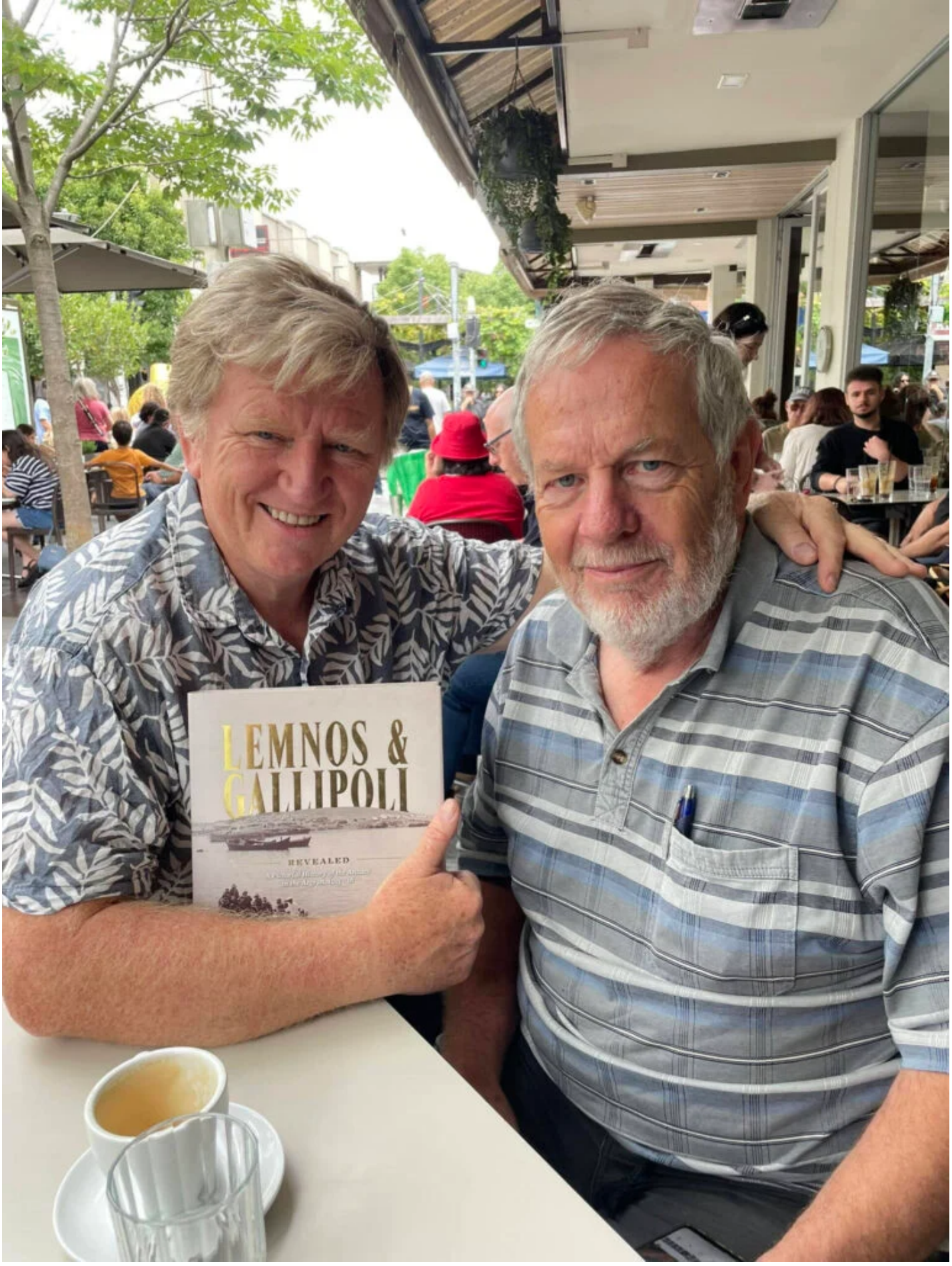
Vin went on to serve on the Western Front, meet his future wife Edith, an English VAD nurse, while convalescing at Northampton War Hospital in 1918. Vin returned to Australia after the war in 1919 with Edith, her sister and her mother and father. He was awarded the 1914/18 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal as well as the Gallipoli Medallion and lapel badge awarded to veterans of the campaign in the 1960’s. Together with Edith, Vin would raise a family of 5 children and live well into his 80s. One of his daughters, Joan, is now 98 years old and lives with Roger and his wife, Dianne, in Melbourne. Joan’s younger sister, Glenyce, now 93, lives in Perth.

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The author (left) in Oakleigh with Roger Dalton (right), the grandson of Lemnos veteran Vin Dalton. Photo: Supplied

Vin's connection to Greece may h
descendents. On his way to Gallip

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many of the Greek Islands as he headed to Lemnos. He witnessed the assembly of the great Allied armada in Lemnos' Mudros Bay. He practiced disembarkation on the waters of the bay. He came ashore and saw its villages and people, commenting on some of their notable features. His experiences and comments are those of many of the young Australians who came to Lemnos during the Gallipoli campaign.

Roger and Dianne have expressed the desire to one day follow in the footsteps of Vin Dalton, walking on Lemnos as he did. I explained how the Australian Government's new Lemnos Remembrance Trail will soon be inaugurated and be a great aid to commemorative visitors like themselves. It was a real pleasure to meet them and to share their family story with its Hellenic connection. I hope they are able to realise their dream – and I hope they enjoy Lemnos & Gallipoli Revealed.

Jim Claven OAM is a trained historian, freelance writer and published author. Secretary of the Lemnos Gallipoli Commemorative Committee, he has researched the Hellenic link to Australia's Anzac story across both world wars for many years. He is the author of Lemnos & Gallipoli Revealed and Associate Producer of Anzac The Greek Chapter documentary. He thanks Roger Dalton for sharing his grandfather's story. He can be contacted at – jimclaven@yahoo.com.au

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