

Horace Edward James Calvert



6258 Private

12th Battalion

A glimpse at the short life of a boy from South Arm, Tasmania, Australia, who answered his country's call to serve and fight in the Western Front.

Author: Terry Roe JP

Horace Calvert was born on 27 March 1889 at South Arm, Tasmania to Margaret (nee Lowther) and Christopher Calvert, apricot farmers from Arm End situated on the South Arm/Opossum Bay Peninsula. Horace was the youngest of 4 children; 2 brothers (Christopher and Bert) and sister (Violet). Horace in his early years attended 'Muddy Plains' school located in School Road Sandford where the one room building still stands today. Horace moved to Nubeena on the Tasman Peninsula and lived and farmed an orchard. According to a local member from the Tasman Peninsula Historical Society, the farm was on the Nubeena to Koonya back road.

Horace was engaged to a young girl from the Derwent Valley but her mother advised her not to marry as she would be marrying below her class/standard. Family stories indicate, that because Horace could not marry his sweetheart, and with a broken heart, he placed a 'for sale' advertisement, dated Wednesday 31 May 1916, in the local chronicle, putting his house and orchard property on the market in preparation for joining the Australian Imperial Force. He volunteered for the AIF at Nubeena on 12 March 1916 where he underwent his medicals and inoculations. However, at the age of 27, standing 5'6^{1/2} inches tall, weighing 10st.10lbs with brown eyes and brown hair, he was formally enlisted into the AIF at Claremont, Tasmania on 5 July 1916 and was assigned to the 12th Battalion, 20th Reinforcement. The 12th Battalion was among the first infantry units raised for the AIF during the First World War. Half of the battalion men were recruited from Tasmania, a quarter from South Australia, and a quarter from Western Australia; and with the 9th, 10th and 11th Battalions formed the 3rd Brigade.

Horace travelled from Tasmania to Melbourne, Victoria on the ship T.S.Loongana and whilst on board, sent a standard T.S.Loongana post card dated 1916 to his sister, Violet:

*"A message I send with a greeting true,
In token of all I would wish for you,
Just a card to show my thoughts you've got,
And a heartfelt prayer,
Forget – me – not"*



Figure 1 South Arm War Memorial

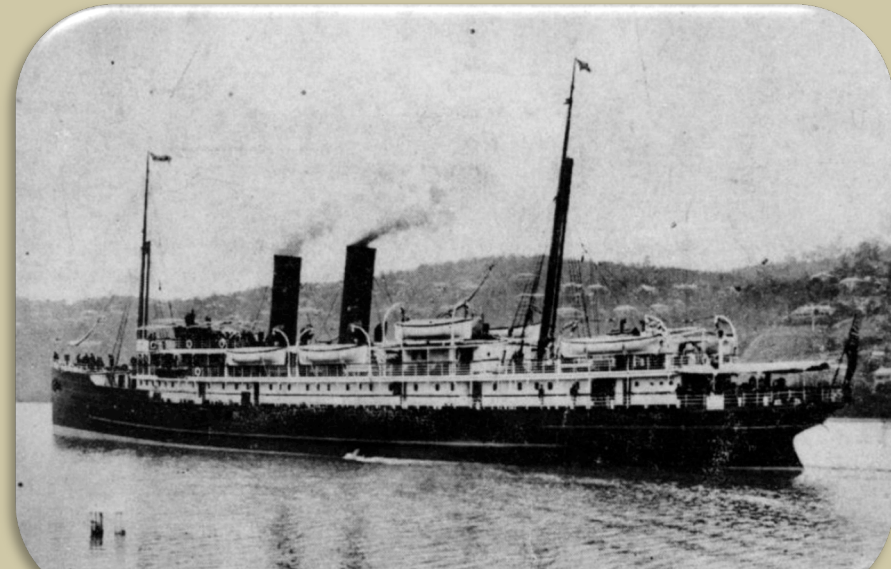


Figure 2 T.S. Loongana

Horace embarked from Melbourne, Victoria on board HMAT A59 Botanist on 24 August 1916.

After being at sea for nearly 2 months, the Botanist docked at Devonport, United Kingdom on the 19 October 1916 and Horace along with other members of the 20th Reinforcements, the 12th Battalion disembarked and marched into “Fovant Camp” in Wiltshire, one of the many transit camps established for troops leaving for, and returning from the battlefields in Northern France. In an extract of a letter to his dear sister Violet dated 4 November 1916, Horace tells Violet about a trip to London:

“We are going to London for four days’ leave, we all enjoyed ourselves, we all had a good time, and we met some very nice young ladies. I went to church in London with a very nice little girl Violet, her name “Nellie Kallick”. She showed me a good bit of London Violet, and we have six days before we go into the firing line and Nellie Kallick wants me to go down to London and I can stay with them. I will go, they are very nice people, very kind”.

On the 10 December 1916, Horace marched into 3rd Training Battalion, stationed at Durrington Camp. During his stay he succumbed to a bout of mumps and was hospitalised from 23 January to 12 February 1917 at “Park House” Hospital. A letter to his brother-in-law Fred (Violet’s husband) describes conditions at the hospital:

*“My dear Fred,
I’m sorry to say that I’m writing to you in hospital. I’m well again now, I am enjoying myself in here, a nice little nurse to look after me. I came in here with the Mumps Fred, there are a lot of sickness over here in the Army, all sorts of complaints the soldiers have. There are about a thousand over here in one hospital and about five hundred in this one with the mumps, it is the first time I have missed drill since I left Claremont”.*

On 10 April 1917 Horace marched out of the 3rd Training Battalion and proceeded overseas to France via Folkestone. Horace arrived at “Etaples” Northern France on 11 April 1917 and joined the 1st A.U.B.D. On the 1 May 1917, Horace was transferred from the 20th Reinforcement, 12th Battalion and marched into and taken on strength of the 12th Battalion, D Coy, XV Platoon in France.

The Battalion’s first major action in France was at Pozieres in the Somme Valley in July 1917. After Pozieres, the Battalion fought at Ypres in Flanders and then returned to the Somme for winter.

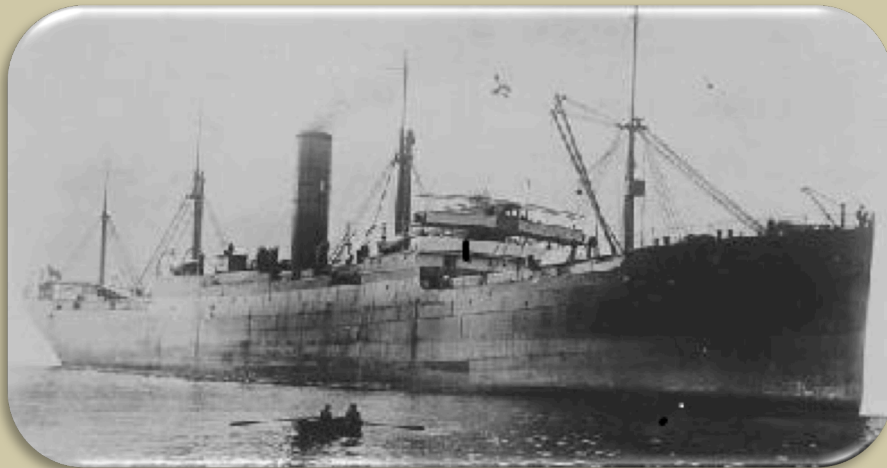


Figure 3 HMAT Botanist

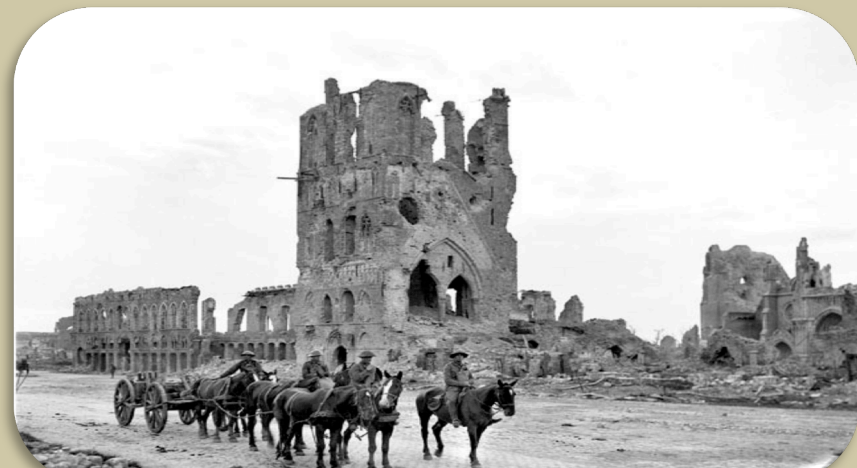


Figure 4 Cloth Hall Ypres - 1916

In 1917 the Battalion took part in the brief advance that followed the German Army's retreat to the Hindenburg Line. For their valorous actions near Boursies during this advance, Captain J E (Jim) Newland, commanding A Company, and Sergeant J W Whittle were each awarded the Victoria Cross.

The Battalion subsequently returned to Belgium to participate in the offensive that became known as the Third Battle of Ypres. In an extract of a letter Horace wrote to Fred, dated 27 November 1917, which tells us of his thoughts when the war will end:-

"The war is still the same. I think it will end next year some time Fred. Old Fritz is getting a hurry up now with us fellows, we have got him on the move now alright. I got a touch of 'trench' feet the last time I was in action, but they are quite well again now.

Fred. I will say goodbye now, hoping you and Violet and the little bay are quite well Fred as this letter leaves me in the best of health.

With best of good luck from your loving brother, Horace".

On the 21 December 1917 in the Warneton Sector of Hubersent area, the enemy laid down a heavy barrage of artillery fire on the support line which resulted in 2 officers and several men being wounded. Private Horace Calvert was one of those men severely wounded and he was taken to the 2nd Casualty Clearing Station.



Figure 5 Stretcher Bearers - Flanders 1916



Figure 6 Casualty Clearing Station

Statements provided by witnesses and platoon mates provide an insight:

L/Cpl H A Hull – “Horace Calvert was in my platoon (XV) and section and was wounded on the night of December 21 in the Warneton Sector. We were on fatigue carrying up to the front line. About 10 o'clock a whizz bang dropped on the duckboards, and blew one of his legs off, and wounded him besides. The S/B took him off to the Dressing Station at Kandahar Farm. There he died. Calvert came from South Arm, Tasmania.”

Pte O C Essener – “I saw him wounded near Ypres. He was caught by pieces of shell which hit him about both legs, one being almost severed. He was out with fatigue party at the time. I knew him well. He lived about 30 miles outside Hobart, Tasmania where he was engaged with farming prior to enlistment. He was taken away to the dressing station in an unconscious condition where he died about 7 hours after his arrival there. I did not see his grave but I believe he was buried at Neuve Eglis. Refer to Pte C J Keen, A Coy 12th Battalion who is now in France, he buried him and can give full details,”

Pte ? – “I knew Calvert pretty well, he came from Tasmania. We were on fatigue party in front of Messines on 21 December. It was a very dark night. I was about 8 yards from Calvert, a shell dropped about 4 yards in front of him. I saw him directly after the explosion. His left leg was blown off, a bit of shrapnel in the head and his left arm was broken. I saw him carried down. I heard he died at the 2nd CCS on the 22 December in the morning”.

Private Horace Edward James Calvert, age 28 died of wounds on the 22 December 1917 at Messines, Belgium. He was buried at Trois-Arbres Cemetery (Plot 11, Row C, Grave No 14), Steenwerck, France.

So the story of the boy from South Arm lives on through his letters and cards.



Figure 7 Terry Roe at Trois Arbres Cemetery



Figure 8 Trois - Arbres Cemetery, Steenwerck, France



Figure 9. Grave of Horace Edward James

In Memory of
Private
Horace Edward James Calvert

8258, 12th Bn., Australian Infantry, A.I.F. who died on 22 December 1917 Age 28

Son of Christopher and Margaret Calvert, of 14, Crown St., Sandy Bay, Tasmania. Native of South Arm.

Remembered with Honour
Trois Arbres Cemetery, Steenwerck



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Figure 10 Wall of Remembrance, Australian War Memorial, Canberra

Horace Edward James Calvert

Service Number: 8258

Rank: Private

Unit: 12th Australian Infantry Battalion

Service: Australian Army

Conflict: First World War, 1914-1918

Date of Death: 22 December 1917

Place of Death: France

Cause of Death: Died of wounds

Age at death: 28

Place of association: South Arm, Tasmania, Australia

Cemetery or memorial details: Trois Arbres Cemetery, Steenwerck, Nord Pas de Calais, France, and The Australian War Memorial Canberra.

Postscript

Rose Bennett, the great niece of Horace, tells the story of her grandmother, Violet and her son (Rose's father – mentioned in Horace's letters) making the arduous trip to Trios Arbres Cemetery in 1932, when Rose's father was 15 years old:

“Dad describes it as having been very difficult, the countryside still littered with tanks and debris from the war. But Gran was determined to find Horace's resting place. She was content. He lay in a well tended Cemetery surrounded by other Australians”.

Such was the impact of Rose's father's experience that she travelled in 2000 with her 15 year old son to find Horace's grave and has visited him on many occasions since.

Lest we forget





HERBERT
FRANCE
DUTY

BELIEVED SON OF CALVERT
OF TASMANIA

IN MEMORY OF
FROM COURT OF
& HIS DESCENDANTS

IN MEMORY OF HORACE
FROM HIS BROTHER
& SISTERS

IN MEMORY OF YOUR
BROTHER
DARRIN PHILLIP STALLY
& ANDREW CALVERT
& FAMILIES

IN
MEMORY OF
HORACE
CALVERT

FROM
SOUTH
AUSTRALIA
TO
TASMANIA
1915

WE
WILL
NEVER
FORGET
YOU

R.I.P
HORACE CALVERT
FAMILIES OF HENRY
& ROBERT CALVERT

WE THANK
YOU FOR YOUR LIFE
DARRIN
CALVERT
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
LEST WE
FORGET
2015

HORACE EDWARD JAMES
CALVERT



6258 PRIVATE

REGIMENT