



WAR MEMORIAL: Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, near Ypres, contains 9901 Commonwealth burials from World War I and another 883 war graves of other nationalities. PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED



Private Cecil 'Charlie' Bott was the eldest son of Henry and Mary Alice Bott, Spring Creek, near Stanthorpe.

Five months of severe battle

Young Cecil Bott dies just five months after he enlisted in Warwick in 1917

■ Peter McLady

CECIL 'Charlie' Bott was the eldest son of Henry and Mary Alice Bott, of Werneth House, Spring Creek, near Stanthorpe.

Two days after his 19th birthday, Cecil enlisted in Warwick on June 26, 1916. He had grown up around Stanthorpe and was working as a labourer.

Cecil left Australia on active service aboard HMAT Ulysses on October 20 and disembarked in Plymouth, England, on December 28.

He travelled to the AIF training camp at Perham Down on the Salisbury Plain.

Early in January 1917, Cecil marched out to the Australian Machine Gun Training Depot at Grantham, Lincolnshire.

Following three months of intensive training in the use of the Vickers machine gun, Cecil left for France on March 10. He spent time at the machine gun base depot at Camiers before joining the 12th Machine Gun Company (12th MGC) in the field on April 16.

According to the War Diary of the 12th MGC, the company was in a training camp at Bresle, near Albert on the Somme.

In mid-May the company travelled by train to Steenwerck, on the French-Belgian border, and on May 28, it moved to a forward area near Neuve Eglise in preparation for the upcoming Battle of Messines. It was then another Stanthorpe man, Pvt James Scott, joined Cecil in the 12th MGC. It appears they became good friends, as Cecil's service record shows photographs of Cecil's grave

were sent to James.

James intended to take the photographs to Cecil's parents however, Pvt James Scott, winner of the Military Medal and Bar, died of wounds received in action in September 1918.

“He was going to carry ammunition with me to the front line. He stood up and was hit in the temple with shrapnel.”

On June 7, following the exploding of mines along the Messines-Wytschaete ridge, the 12th MGC joined the attack at the Battle of Messines. Two sections initially supported the 12th Brigade AIF before the company took up forward positions to the north and south of Messines.

On the way to the front line, the men were forced to wear respirators as the enemy sent over many gas shells. The company fought in the frontline at Messines until relieved on June 12.

The 12th MGC suffered heavy casualties in the battle: 10 men were killed, 25 wounded and four missing.

For most of September, the company was training in northern France but was then called to join the Battle of Passchendaele.

On September 22 the 12th MGC marched into the 1st Anzac MG Camp at Belgian Chateau, near Ypres, where it camped in shelters and

dugouts.

The 12th MGC was ordered to move to the front line to relieve the 5th MGC on the night of October 10. Captain Crouch and 2nd Lieutenant Cullimore inspected the new front line position and found the 5th MGC practically wiped out.

At 2.30am on October 11 the 12th MGC left Belgian Chateau and at dawn arrived at the support line at Zonnebeke.

Orders were received to send four guns and teams “over the top” with the infantry attack planned for the morning of October 12.

The remaining eight guns and teams were to be brought forward for SOS and creeping barrage work.

Heavy casualties were sustained by the 12th MGC while getting in position and the War Diary noted “showery cold weather all day and mud and general conditions most severe”.

At 2.30am on October 12 the four guns and teams supporting the attack of the 47th and 48th Battalions moved forward to the rear of the jumping-off trench.

Again it was noted that casualties were “pretty heavy”.

At 5.45am the attack on the village of Passchendaele began and the 12th Brigade AIF practically gained its final objective however brigades either side failed to link up. The 12th Brigade was forced to move back to the line of its first objective and was covered in retirement by the remaining guns of the 12th MGC “hop over party”.

All that remained of this group were two officers, one NCO and eight men together



Private Cecil Bott is buried in Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, near Ypres, Belgium.

with two machine guns.

It was on this day Pvt Cecil Bott suffered a severe wound to the head. He was first treated by a field ambulance unit and moved to the 17th Casualty Clearing Station, Belgium.

The Officer Commanding the 17th Casualty Clearing Station wrote regarding Cecil:

“He was admitted into this station suffering from a severe shell wound of the head and in a critical condition. His condition gradually became worse, and it is with regret I have to inform you of his death, which occurred at 3.45am on the morning of 18/10/17 as a result of this wound. He was buried the same day in the Soldiers' cemetery near to

this hospital, his grave being duly marked and registered.”

Pv Clifton Reid, of St. Kilda, Victoria, told the Red Cross, in June 1918:

“[Cecil] was a mate of mine and was alongside me in a support trench at Wytschaete at about 6am one day in October 1917. He was going to carry ammunition with me to the front line. He stood up and was hit in the temple with shrapnel. He died at the ADS about 3km back three days later.”

Pvt Cecil Bott is buried in Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, near Ypres, Belgium. The cemetery contains 9901 Commonwealth burials of First World War soldiers

and 883 war graves of other nationalities.

John Laffin in his book, *Guide to Australian Battlefields of the Western Front*, wrote of this cemetery: “Just behind the extreme range of enemy shellfire and on a railway line, it was a natural place for hospitals to establish themselves. The hospital staff began to bury their dead in a hopfield, which became the second greatest British war cemetery after Tyne Cot. More Australians (1131) are buried here than anywhere except Tyne Cot. Lijssenthoek is, in effect, the quintessence of collective suffering”

The epitaph on Private Cecil Bott's headstone reads: Life's Labour O'er.