



ALWAYS REMEMBERED: John Swaysland's name on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.



PHOTO: PETER MCLADY John Swaysland. PHOTO: GARY PARSONS, DISCOVERING ANZACS

Unmarked grave for soldiers

The loss of one the Granite Belt's own soldiers, killed fighting the war in France

■ Peter McLady

JACK Swaysland was the first Stanthorpe soldier to be killed in action on the Western Front. Jack, 23, died at Pozieres where the Australian forces joined the fighting in the Battle of the Somme in July 1916.

Australians died in greater numbers at Pozieres than anywhere else on the Western Front. Paddy Hyde, another Stanthorpe soldier, also died at Pozieres, six days later.

John 'Jack' Swaysland was the son of Stephen and Emily Swaysland who lived at The Retreat, Thulimbah.

Born at Collarenebri, New South Wales, he was a 22-year-old labourer when he enlisted on June 10, 1915, joining the 9th reinforcements of the 9th Battalion. He joined his battalion on January 19, 1916, at Tel-el-Kebir, Egypt, a large Australian Imperial Force (AIF) training camp 110km north east of Cairo.

The 9th Battalion moved from its training camp into position to defend the Suez Canal at Gebel Habietta. In his book, *From Anzac to the Hindenberg Line*, Norman Harvey described the conditions at Gebel Habietta: rations and supplies were scarce and the blowing sand meant the Australian trenches had to be continually dug out.

In March 1916, General Birdwood, Commander of I Anzac Corps, announced the Australian infantry were to leave Egypt and join the fighting on the Western Front. Jack sailed from Alexandria on March 27 with the 9th Battalion arriving in Marseilles six days later. The

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Border Post, 1916.

Australians headed north by train from Marseilles, and after two and a half days arrived in Belgian Flanders at Godewaersvelde.

According to Harvey, the 9th Battalion moved south of Armentieres into a sector known as "the nursery" where they were to become accustomed to conditions on the front line for what lay ahead. The Battle of the Somme began on July 1 with an attack by British and French infantry divisions either side of the River Somme in northern France. Despite some early gains, the attack ultimately failed. After three successive failed British attacks at Pozieres, the 1st Australian Division was called up to lead the next attack. The 9th Battalion left Godewaersvelde on July 10 and moved into position the following day on the Somme at Naours, about 15km north of Amiens. The Australian 1st Division began its attack on Pozieres on July 23. The 9th Battalion's objectives were to capture Pozieres Trench, just south of the village, the German second

line of trenches, and the south-eastern side of the road from Bapaume to Albert. In the four days of hard fighting that followed, the 9th Battalion captured all of these objectives and together with the other battalions of the 1st Division received the congratulations of Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, General Birdwood and General Gough. But the cost was high: 57 men killed, 271 wounded, and another 65 missing. Jack Swaysland was first reported missing in action at Pozieres. On August 4 he was declared killed in action on July 23, 1916. Corporal Alexander Villiers told the Red Cross on August 24: I am corporal of the Lewis Gun Section, to which Swaysland and Aldermann belonged. Both men were wounded by shrapnel from a bomb and were being carried to a shell hole for security; but both were hopeless cases and were eventually left.

The next day Swaysland's identification disc was brought in but not Aldermann's. C. Lowe of the LGS was an eyewitness of what happened I was not.

The Border Post ran an article on September 1, it read: "We regret to confirm our previous report of the death of Private Jack Swaysland. The young soldier was killed in action in France on July 23."

On September 11, the Officer in Charge of Base Records wrote to Littleton Groom, the Member for Darling Downs in the House of Representatives, giving updated details on a number of missing and wounded men. One of those



HONOURING: Wreath at Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

PHOTO: PETER MCLADY

mentioned was Jack.

The letter states: No. 2905 Private J.R. Swaysland, 9th Battalion, who was previously reported as missing on 22/7/16, is now reported by cable message dated London, 21/8/16, as having been killed in action on 23/7/16. Next-of-kin is shown as Mr S. Swaysland (father) Stanthorpe, Qld.

The Secretary of the Stanthorpe Red Cross Society wrote to Base Records on May 15, 1917: "Re 2905 Private Swaysland deceased. I have been approached by his father who, except for official notification of his son's death, has had no report at all from the Authorities although he has written several times.

"I have been fortunate in seeing reports through the Red Cross Information Bureau, and as Mr Swaysland is anxious to secure as a memento some of his boys effects. Could you kindly forward anything you may have to me and I shall gladly hand over to Mr Swaysland.

"Stephen Swaysland received his son's personal effects in August, 1917: a torch, pocket book, testament, photos, brush, tea glass, two books, matchbox, belt, badges, brush, and a pencil.

"Upon receiving these, Swaysland wrote a letter to Base Records: I have to complain amongst the effects I have not received presentation wristlet watch, fountain pen, and other

things which should have been amongst the effects. But most of all I would treasure the watch. Kindly asking if same can be traced. His name being inscribed on the inside of back cover.

"On 16 June 1921, Base Records Melbourne wrote to Swaysland to say: I regret very much that, notwithstanding the efforts of our Graves Services Unit, we have so far been unable to obtain any trace of the last resting place of your son the late No. 2905 Private J.R. Swaysland."

Private John Swaysland has no known grave but is remembered with honour on the wall of the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, near Amiens in France.