

Soldiers make the ultimate sacrifice

Private buried in France

■ Peter McLady

AS 1917 began, the harshest winter in decades gripped the Western Front.

The Battle of the Somme had ground to a halt in November 1916 and the Allied commanders were focused on a spring offensive planned to finally break the German lines.

The Allied campaign was in a precarious state.

The Russian Front was heading towards certain defeat and the newly re-elected President Wilson remained reluctant for the United States of America to join the war in Europe.

Against this backdrop, the five AIF Divisions stood steadfastly in position on the Western Front and awaited news of their next move.

The Australian troops had little idea of the suffering that lay ahead in 1917.

It was the year of the great battles of Bullecourt and Messines, and culminated in the horror of the Battle of Passchendaele.

Communities across Australia were plunged into grief and despair as they received news of the mounting casualties.

On the Western Front, Colonel Arthur Butler estimated 20,036 Australian men were killed and 76,838 wounded or taken prisoner of war in 1917 (Butler 1943, 896).

Stanthorpe and the Granite Belt were particularly hard hit with 18 young soldiers from the

district losing their lives.

In two tragic weeks in October, seven died fighting in the mud and squalor of Belgian Flanders.

News of the casualties was received on a regular basis, beginning in January 1917 with the death of Private James Patton.

Sometimes a name on a war memorial can offer intrigue as well as memory.

Private James Patton, who grew up in inner Brisbane, is believed to be the "J.Paton" remembered on the Stanthorpe World War I Memorial.

James was working for the Railways Department in Stanthorpe when he enlisted.

Becoming one of the original members of the 25th Battalion, he served as a storeman in Egypt and England before he joined his battalion to fight on the Western Front in December 1916.

Only a few weeks later he was severely wounded and was admitted, dangerously ill, to hospital in Rouen in France.

He died nine days later.

James, the son of James and Sarah Ellen Patton, of Toowong, was six years old when his father drowned in the Coomera River in May 1901.

Sarah was left to support James and his four-year-old brother, David. James grew up around Auchenflower in Brisbane and attended Brisbane Boys Central State School.



WAR GRAVES: Eighteen young soldiers from the Stanthorpe district lost their lives in 1917, including seven in two weeks in October. PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED

In 1912, his mother married Robert McQueen.

After leaving school, James went to work for the Queensland Railways Department, following in the footsteps of his father who had been a railway stationmaster.

At the outbreak of World War I, James was a night officer for the Queensland Railways at Stanthorpe.

He had served in the

be the main feature in later years was not considered in those pre-Gallipoli days" (Doneley 1997, 5).

Together with the rest of his battalion, James embarked from Brisbane on HMAT Aeneas on June 29.

The battalion spent a week in Sydney before heading south and then west across the Great Australian Bight on their way to Egypt.

HMAT Aeneas arrived in

transferred to the Park House Training Camp in England in September 1916. He rejoined the 25th Battalion in the field in France on December 18, 1916.

Within a few weeks of arriving, on January 14, 1917, James was admitted in a dangerously ill condition to the 5th General Hospital in Rouen, France.

It was recorded he was suffering from wounds to his leg, hand, shoulder and a fractured upper arm.

Private James Patton died of his wounds on January 23, 1917 at the age of 22 years.

James' service record shows he was wounded in action on January 10, 1917.

According to Bob Doneley in his book *Black Over Blue*, it was bitterly cold on the night of January 10 when the 25th Battalion moved into dugouts in Delville Wood on the Somme.

Upon arrival, six working parties were sent out to repair duckboard tracks leading to the front line three miles away, while other parties went out into no-man's-land to dig a new trench.

That night, Delville Wood was shelled and the 25th Battalion suffered five

casualties (Doneley 1997, 76).

Private James O'Brien told the Red Cross that he saw James Patton being wounded.

"He was caught by a shell, which blew his arm off, and wounded him in the legs. He was taken to the Dressing Station about a mile away, where he lived about 12 hours.

"He was unconscious all the time. I did not see his grave but I think he was buried at Delville Wood. I cannot refer to anyone for particulars."

Private James Patton is buried in St. Sever Cemetery Extension in Rouen, France.

Rouen is a city on the River Seine in northwest France.

This cemetery was situated near a number of hospitals during World War I and so contains the graves of many men who died of wounds.

Of the 8348 Commonwealth burials in St. Sever Cemetery, 782 are Australians.

The inscription on James Patton's headstone reads:

No Morning Dawns
No Night Returns
But What We Think of Thee.

“The Australian troops had little idea of the suffering that lay ahead in 1917.”

Senior Cadets and then the Militia.

On February 22, 1915, James enlisted in Stanthorpe in the AIF and became one of the original members of the 25th Battalion.

He went into training at the Enoggera camp near Brisbane.

"Training in early 1915 consisted of skirmishing in open country, musketry, bayonet fighting and trenching. The training in trench warfare that was to

Alexandria, Egypt, in early August.

James, a storeman, was one of only six men who remained in Alexandria when the 25th Battalion left for the fighting at Gallipoli in September (Doneley 1997, 20).

He remained in Alexandria, too, when, following their return from Gallipoli, the 25th Battalion was sent to fight on the Western Front in March 1916.

James was eventually



Private James Patton died on January 23, 1917.

