Brothers torn apart by war

Young lives lost on the battle fields

■ **Peter McLady**

EDWIN "Eddie" Hindmarsh and two of his five brothers enlisted in the First World War. Only one of the three Hindmarsh soldiers survived the fighting.

William, the oldest of those who enlisted, signed up in July 1915, Eddie in September 1915, and Arthur, the youngest, in January 1916.

They were the sons of Peter and Mary Ann Hindmarsh of Lyra, near Stanthorpe.

Edwin was killed in the Battle of Bullecourt in April 1917, and two months later, Arthur died in the Battle of Messines.

At the age of 30, Eddie enlisted in Toowoomba and joined the 15th reinforcements of the 15th Battalion.

His mother was named as next-of-kin as his father, Peter, had died in 1914.

Following initial training, Eddie left Brisbane aboard HMT Commonwealth on March 28, 1916, arriving in Alexandria, Egypt on May 5.

Eddie sailed from Egypt for further training in England on August 6.

He spent two months with the 4th Training Battalion at the Rollestone Camp on the Salisbury Plain. From there he was sent to France to fight on the Western Front, joining the 15th Battalion in the field on October 4.

The 15th Battalion was in the front line at Zillebeke, near Ypres in Belgian Flanders. This was a dangerous section of the front with the battalion subject to daily enemy artillery and mortar fire.

Rain fell constantly and the battalion was glad to be eventually relieved.

The battalion moved to the Somme and became the reserve battalion for the 4th Brigade, undertaking fatigue work that included road and rail construction, hut building and unloading munitions.

However, as Lieutenant Chataway wrote in his book, History of the 15th Battalion: "the winter had now begun to set in, and for the next seven weeks, the men wallowed in mud, morning, noon, and night".

The conditions worsened for Eddie and his mates.

In late January, the 15th Battalion relieved the 46th Battalion at Gueudecourt in northern France.
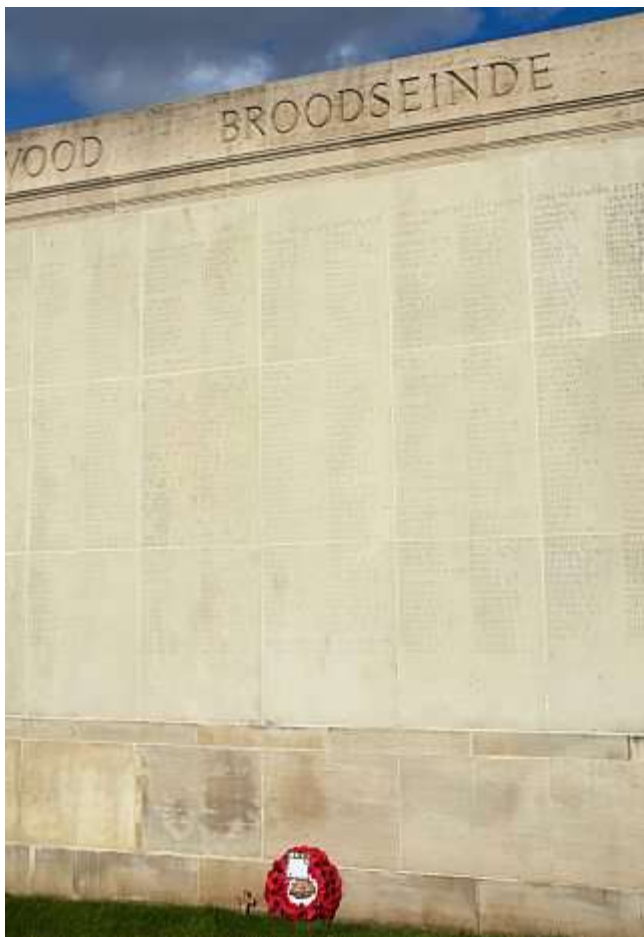
Chataway wrote "The countryside was frozen, and the Somme was a solid block of ice – an occurrence so rare that nobody had witnessed such a phenomenon for eighty years".

The year ahead was one of terrible loss on the Western Front.

WE WILL REMEMBER: A bird's eye view of the Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, France.   PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED / THE QUEENSLANDER

The Australian National Memorial in Villers-Bretonneux.

Edwin "Eddie" Hindmarsh (taken from The Queenslander, Saturday, May 20, 1916).

Chataway wrote: "The year 1917 was one of unending battle. It was a year of monstrous and desperate conflict. All the roads of war were crowded with men and guns and the battered remains of men and guns".

One of the darkest days in the history of the 15th Battalion was April 11, 1917.

On that morning, the 15th Battalion, as part of the AIF 4th Brigade, launched an attack on the Hindenberg Line south of Riencourt, in northern France.

The battle became known as the First Battle of Bullecourt.

Despite enemy artillery and machine gun fire, the battalion fought its way through the thick barbed wire defences and captured parts of the German trenches.

The German troops staged a fierce counter-attack and drove the Australian troops back, eventually forcing them to withdraw to their original positions.

The losses incurred by the 15th Battalion were devastating, with casualties totalling 19 officers and 364 other ranks.

Private Edwin Hindmarsh died in the fighting at Bullecourt that day.

The Stanthorpe Border Post reported his death in May 1917: "Another of our heroes has fallen in defence of his country in the person of Private Edward Hindmarsh, of Lyra, who was killed in action on the 11th April. No particulars are at hand. The sad news was broken to the deceased's family at Lyra by Rev. D. Fletcher who journeyed from Stanthorpe to convey the sad intelligence to Private Hindmarsh's relatives. We feel sure the sympathy of the whole community will go out to them in their time of trial".

Private John Maloney, a station overseer from Hughenden, wrote to the Red Cross:

"Re E. Hindmarsh of the 15th Battalion A.I.F. reported killed in action on the 11th April it is with regret that I am able to verify same. I happened to be alongside of him when a high explosive shell burst among us, he being killed instantly.

With regards to his being buried, I am not in a position to state as we were relieved shortly afterwards. He was killed in a sunken road which was front line trench the morning we made the attack on Bullecourt. We were relieved by the 2nd Australian Division and in all probability he would have been buried where he fell as the losses were very heavy. I knew Eddie Hindmarsh personally having come over from Australia with him."

Private John MacDonald, a painter from Mullumbimby, told the Red Cross:

"We were waiting in a sunken road at Bullecourt. It was about an hour before we went over when a shell landed on the road killing Hindmarsh and about 10 others. He was killed instantaneously. Private Meade and I pulled him to the side of the road. I do not know where he is buried. I told his brother about him, I met him in a train at Bapaume."

In November 1917, Private George Pettiford, a farmer from Ballandean near Stanthorpe, wrote:

"Re Private E Hindmarsh. He was killed at Bullecourt and buried on the field by our pioneers. He was about 5'9 or 10" and proportionately built, dark complexion. His home in Australia was I think Syra [sic] on the Queensland Border. He came over with me in the 15/15th and joined the Battalion September 1916 in France. He was a good soldier and a good friend and was greatly missed by all, and all the boys join me in asking you to convey our sympathy to his mother in her great loss. We have also found out that his brother Fred, who was in the 42nd Battalion, was killed at Messines on 7/6/17 and was buried on the field."

Arthur Frederick Hindmarsh was killed in the Battle of Messines on June 10, 1917, two months after Eddie had died in action.

Some 2250 Australian soldiers who died at Bullecourt have no known grave.

One of these is Private Edwin Hindmarsh. He is remembered with honour on the wall of the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, France.