



WREATH IN HONOUR: The 2nd Australian Division Memorial at Mont St Quentin, north of Peronne.

PHOTOS: PETER MCLADY



Private James Scott's headstone at the La Chapelle Cemetery in Peronne.

# Germans claim Private Scott

## Bravery medallist James Scott gunned down by enemy at Hindenburg Line

■ Peter McLady

JAMES Scott was the business partner and great friend of fellow Scotsman, George Alexander. They lived at Mallow, near Stanthorpe, and owned the Wylie Creek Tin Dredging Syndicate. James and George were in their mid-thirties when they enlisted five months apart in 1916. James served with distinction in the A.I.F., and was awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery in the field twice in two weeks. James and George died three weeks apart in the fighting near Peronne, France, in 1918.

James Scott was born at Comrie, West Perthshire, Scotland. He attended Stirling High School and trained as a draper. Upon migrating to Australia, James became a miner and grazier. James enlisted in Brisbane on August 3, 1916, stating he was 31-years-old. However, according to Mary Alexander, George's mother, it is more likely James was 37-years-old.

James initially listed his mother, Mrs. Cristiana Scott, G.P.O., St. Martins, London, as his next of kin, but she apparently died while he was on active service. In September 1917, James wrote a will leaving his estate to George Alexander, and in the case of his death, to Mary Alexander, who lived in Peterhead, Scotland.

James joined the 22nd reinforcements of the 15th Battalion and later the Machine Gun Reinforcements. James was posted to the Machine Gun Depot at Seymour, Victoria. On 17 January 1917 he

departed Melbourne on active service aboard *HMAT Omrah* arriving in Plymouth, England, on March 27. He was immediately transferred to the Machine Gun Corps training base at Belton Park, Lincolnshire.

"Here the men were trained in the use of the Vickers machine gun. Each gun required a team of men. Only physically fit and intelligent men were accepted into the Corps due to the weight of the equipment and technical knowledge needed to fire and repair enemy damage to the gun," (BBC, 2014).

Following two months further training, James proceeded to the front line on May 21 where he joined the 12th Machine Gun Company (M.G.C.) in a reserve position at Steenwerck, Belgian Flanders. James was given little time to settle into life on the front line for, on June 7, the 12th M.G.C. joined the attack at the Battle of Messines. Two sections supported the 12th Infantry Brigade and another two provided covering fire for the attack by the New Zealand Division.

The 12th M.G.C. advanced into positions to the north and south of the village of Messines while under an enemy bombardment of gas shells. Casualties were heavy for the company: 10 men were killed, 25 were wounded and four men were missing in action (AWM, 1916). The company was relieved from the front line at Messines on June 12.

The 12th M.G.C. spent July mainly training near Neuf Berquin in Northern France,

but were on standby to support the 4th and 13th Infantry Brigades near Hill 63 in case of enemy attack. The company returned to the trenches northeast of Messines for two weeks from August 8. Throughout, enemy shellfire inflicted significant casualties on the company.

On September 22 the 12th M.G.C. travelled by bus to the Ypres Salient where it supported the attack by Australian infantry in the Battle of Passchendaele. The 12th M.G.C. provided a successful machine gun barrage for the Australian 4th Division in the Battle of Polygon Wood.

Private James Scott was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in the field at Passchendaele in September

**“He was a man of high and noble character.”**

— Mary Alexander

and October 1917.

Captain David Martin, in his recommendation, wrote:

"On night of 28th/29th September 1917, at Ypres, on Westhoek-Zonnebeke Road, for conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. The tail end of "B" Company of 16th Battalion, A.I.F. were caught in a barrage of high explosives, and 14 men became casualties. In spite of gas shells and high explosives falling nearby this man undaunted assisted an N.C.O. of 16th Battalion in dressing the casualties, and afterwards removing them



La Chapelle British and Indian Cemetery, Peronne, France.

to a Dressing Station."

The recommendation was signed by Brigadier-General James Robertson, Commander 12th Australian Infantry Brigade.

Two weeks later James was awarded a Bar to his Military Medal.

Notices of James being awarded the Military Medal and Bar were listed in *The London Gazette* under the heading:

"His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Military Medal for bravery in the field to the under mentioned Non-commissioned Officers and Men."

In September 1918, the Australian infantry continued to pursue the retreating German forces back to the Hindenburg Line, following the successful Allied offensive that began on August 8. On September 18, 10 Allied infantry divisions began an attack on the Hindenburg Outpost Line west of the St Quentin Canal. The Australian 1st and 4th Divisions were heavily

involved in the fighting and the 12th M.G.C. was attached to the Australian 12th Infantry Brigade. The attack continued until September 20 and generally succeeded with 12,000 German prisoners taken and over 100 guns captured (Bean 1946, 486). The War Diary of the 12th M.G.C. noted that "taking into consideration the nature of the operation casualties were extremely light, being three officers and 14 other ranks" (AWM, 1918). Private James Scott was one of the casualties. Wounded in action on September 20, he was admitted to the 12th Casualty Clearing Station the next day, listed as "dangerously wounded". James died on 22 September. Mary Alexander wrote that he was 39-years-of-age.

The Commanding Officer of the 12th Casualty Clearing Station wrote:

"No.607. Pte. J. Scott died here at 5 a.m. 22.9.1918 from the affects of Gunshot Wounds, both thighs, Multiple Wounds right leg and penetrating wound abdomen. He was buried at

La Chapelle Military Cemetery (near Peronne) the same day. The officiating chaplain was the Rev. Hopkins (Pres) attached to this unit."

In October 1918, Mrs Edmund Bent, of Mallow, via Stanthorpe, wrote to Army Base Records regarding James:

"I saw in the newspaper that he had died of wounds on the 22nd September 1918. That is all we know and would be very grateful if you will give us all information regarding him. He advised us we would be the first to get word if anything happened to him as he has no next of kin. Anxiously awaiting your reply."

The Memorial Plaque and Memorial Scroll for James Scott were sent to Mary Alexander in 1922.

In the Roll of Honour for James Scott, Mary wrote:

"He was a man of high and noble character. He was in co-partnership with George Alexander, 22nd Machine Gun Coy., in a tin mining business and they were great friends. Both of whom have given their lives."