

THE OUTSTANDING AUSTRALIAN '1916 POZIERES RIDGE, SOMME' D.C.M RECOMMENDED M.M. AWARDED TO AN NCO, 26TH INFANTRY BATTALION. LATER COMMISSIONED AND SERVING AS BRIGADE SNIPING OFFICER AND THEN INTELLIGENCE OFFICER ATTACHED TO BRIGADE H.Q., HE WAS AWARDED A MILITARY CROSS FOR THE BATTLE OF MENIN ROAD, YPRES, 1917 AND A BAR TO HIS M.C. FOR THE BATTLE OF AMIENS, AUGUST 1918, BECOMING ONE OF JUST 9 AUSTRALIANS AWARDED THIS COMBINATION OF AWARDS FOR WW1. TWICE WOUNDED IN ACTION AND GASSED ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS, POST WAR HE SUFFERED MUCH FROM THE EFFECTS OF THE GAS ATTACKS AND DEPRESSION, TRAGICALLY TAKING HIS OWN LIFE IN MARCH 1931, HE WAS BURIED IN AN UNMARKED PAUPERS GRAVE



MILITARY MEDAL, G.V.R. '634 AR: SJT: G. HARRY. 26/AUST: INF: BN:'

M.M. *London Gazette* 21 September 1916.

The original recommendation (for a D.C.M.) states: '*Previous to the attack on the 4th August 1916, Sergeant Harry although a non-combatant put in a strong plea to take part in the attack. The O.C. Battalion Dump became a casualty on the way up and Sergeant Harry took over his job. Despite the fact that he was once completely buried and later was severely shaken by a high explosive shell he stuck to his job gamely for the 50 hours during which his Battalion occupied the trenches. He personally acted as guide for carrying parties across the open from the dump to the captured trenches on many occasions at great personal risk. In all his duties in the attack on Pozieres Ridge he showed great courage and control.*'

M.C. *London Gazette* 1 January 1918.

The original recommendation states: '*Lieut. Harry as Intelligence Officer of the 7th A.I.*

Brigade during eight days prior to the attack on 20.9.17 on Westhoek Ridge, was occupied reconnoitring the front over which the attack was to be made, and in noting the enemy barrages. This work entailed being constantly under heavy enemy shell fire almost continuously. His courage and devotion to duty cannot be too highly spoken of. As a result of his plucky and clever reconnaissance, Battalions were assembled for the attack in forward positions where they were immune from hostile shelling, and up to the time of their actually taking part in the assault, these Battalions suffered no casualties. It is certain that but for this reconnaissance, many casualties would have occurred during the assembly of these Battalions while they waited to go over.'

M.C. Second Award Bar *London Gazette* 7 November 1918.

The original recommendation states: 'During the operations on the 11th August 1918, South of Framerville, near Amiens, the situation on the right flank was very obscure. Lieut. Harry went forward right out into the gap between the Right Battalion of this Brigade and the Left Battalion of the neighbouring Division, under heavy machine gun and rifle fire. In spite of the enemy barrage, he proceeded to within 100 yards of the Hun posts, and though his clothing was pierced by enemy weapons fire, he went on and obtained information required. He showed remarkable courage and determination.'



Gilbert Harry, aged 24, by trade a Gunsmith, of 'Brae Lossie', Prospect Terrace, South Brisbane, enlisted in the 26th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, 13 May 1915. Details of his rank on joining and immediate promotions are not noted but it appears he was appointed the rank of Armoury Sergeant pretty much straight away. Landing at Gallipoli on 12 September 1915, on 16 September, Harry transferred to Ordnance, ANZAC, serving in this

post until 30 September when he returned to his Battalion. After a period in hospital; 17-26 October, it seems he was then posted back to Ordnance, ANZAC, remaining there until disembarking at Alexandria with 26 Battalion in January 1916. Landing in France on 21 March 1916, on 21 May 1916, he was temporarily attached to Divisional Armoury. Commissioned Temporary 2nd Lieutenant, 16 August 1916, in September he was awarded the Military Medal *'for services rendered during the recent fighting at Pozieres'* and at the same time is noted as doing duty as 7th Brigade Sniping Officer. Promoted Lieutenant on 9 December 1916, between 13 February and 6 March 1917, he attended the Staff Course at Clare College (England) before joining Headquarters, 7th Infantry Brigade in France as Intelligence Officer. Wounded in action, 4 October 1917 (face), he remained on duty but a week later received leave and rejoined Headquarters, 7th Infantry Brigade on the 29 October. Awarded the Military Cross on 1 January 1918 for his actions during the Battle of Menin Road, Ypres, September 1917.

Remaining as 7th Infantry Brigade in France as Intelligence Officer, on 19 July 1918, he was temporarily attached as ADC to General Officer Commanding 2nd Division, before returning to Brigade Headquarters the following month. Wounded again on 1 September 1918 (shell splinters), he remained on duty but had a weeks leave to Paris from September 30, having been appointed Temporary Captain on 19 September. On 8 November 1918, he was awarded the Bar to his Military Cross, for gallantry during the battle of Amiens in August that year, becoming one of just nine Australians awarded this combination of awards for WW1.

Captain Harry returned to Australia in July 1919 and was discharged from the Army in September that year. A medical report noting him having suffered shell splinters ion various parts of the body, a wound to his nose and having been gassed on a number of occasions but had never been evacuated. At this time he was still suffering with a chronic cough, hoarseness and short winded palpitations from the *'effects of gassing – lungs'*.

Post War, Harry was unable to work his land due to his various injuries and moved to Gympie in Queensland and became a dairy farmer, though not successfully. Suffering much from the effects of the gas attacks and depression, March 1931, he took his own life. Aged just 37, he was buried in an unmarked paupers grave in Gympie . 78 years later, after an investigation by the RSL, a memorial service to this brave man was held and headstone was finally added to his grave.

An excellent article on Harry, including much about his later left can be found here:

<https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/person/193837>

BATTLE FOR POZIERES RIDGE, 4TH-6TH AUGUST 1916

'The assembly of the assaulting troops on the evening of the 4th was not accomplished without considerable confusion and loss, for the German artillery fire was heavy on communication trenches and "jumping-off" positions. All difficulties, however, were overcome by the determination and energy of subordinate leaders, and, for the most part, the leading waves moved forward punctually at 9.15pm in order to get close to the barrage before it lifted.

South-east of Bapaume road Br.-General W. Holmes's 5th (N.S.W.) Brigade attacked with the 20th Battalion on the right and the 18th on the left. Here O.G.1 was captured easily, but hand to hand fighting occurred before O.G.2 fell to the third and fourth waves of the assault. This trench was so badly damaged by the British bombardment that it was not easily recognised, and some of the more ardent spirits ran into the British barrage as they pushed forward beyond. Consolidation began promptly, Lewis-gun posts being established along the site of O.G.2. On the right, the 20th blocked the entrance to Torr Trench and formed a defensive

flank for the attack of the 68th Brigade (left of the Fourth Army) on Torr Trench had failed. Between the Bapaume road and the track leading to Courcellette, the 7th Brigade (Br.-General J. Paton) employed three battalions: from right to left, the 27th (South Australia), 25th (Queensland) and 26th (Queensland and Tasmania), the 22nd Battalion of the 6th (Victoria) Brigade forming the extreme left of the frontal attack. Here, as elsewhere, the foremost infantry reached O.G.1 on the heels of the barrage, finding the German wire no obstacle; but the third and fourth waves were caught in the hostile protective barrage, and suffered considerable loss. There was some loss of direction in the advance, so that the O.G. line between the Bapaume road and "The Elbow" were assaulted by only three companies of the 27th Battalion, the other battalions crowding to the left. Nevertheless, O.G.1 was everywhere occupied without much trouble, and the attack swept on to O.G.2. Near the road on the right this trench had been obliterated and was not occupied by the 27th Battalion; neither was the site of the windmill, also included in the objective of the 7th Brigade. Farther to the left the Australians caught the German machine gunners before they could open fire, many of the defenders being bombed in their dug-outs, and after some sharp fighting most of O.G. 2 fell into Australian hands. German dead, grim testimony to the effective fire of the British artillery, lay in hundreds about and beyond the captured trenches.

The main task of the infantry had been accomplished in less than an hour. On the left flank, however, the prevailing wind was unfavourable for smoke, and a detachment of the 23rd Battalion (6th Brigade), which was to link up with the O.G. lines along the Courcellette track, was checked by fire of a machine gun from the north. It was not until late on the 5th August, after this machine gun had been captured, that the left flank was made secure.

12 NEWS

Brave Digger saluted after 78 years in a pauper's grave

War hero is finally honoured

Glenis Green

RED poppies placed reverently in a row and a ribboned wreath marked with the poignant words "Lest We Forget" were part of a belated recognition for highly decorated World War I hero Captain Gilbert Harry at Gympie yesterday.

The honouring of the old soldier was 78 years overdue.

The discovery of his body in an unmarked grave in the Gympie Cemetery this year sparked an intense Returned Services League investigation into the recipient of the Military Medal and Military Cross and Bar.

The search culminated in yesterday's moving memorial service, when members of the

RSL district dignitaries and Capt Harry's niece, Anne Delisle, gathered at his newly crafted headstone.

The mystery began when Narangba man Gary Parsons, who was researching the history of the 26th Battalion for a book, alerted the Gympie RSL sub-branch that he had found one of its soldiers, Capt Harry, buried in an unmarked grave.

Born in Britain on February 21, 1893, Capt Harry served in the Derbyshire Volunteers for 18 months and migrated to Australia as an 18-year-old, later moving to Milmeran.

He enlisted in the AIF at Enoggera and sailed to war in June 1915, serving at Gallipoli, returning to Egypt and then heading to the Western front,



TRIBUTE... Capt Gilbert Harry, above, was finally given a soldier's funeral at Gympie yesterday, attended by his niece Anne Delisle, left.

where he served in France and Belgium from 1916-19.

Wounded twice and almost buried alive during an artillery attack, he was also a victim of mustard gas attacks but survived to return home to Australia.

His injuries meant he was not fit enough to work his Milmeran land holding and instead he moved to the Miva-Theebine area just north of Gympie, where he became a dairy farmer.

He died at 38 from the effects

of the gas attacks and was buried in a pauper's grave.

It was not until Mr Parsons began his inquiries and Mrs Delisle also started researching her family tree that Capt Harry's gallantry came to light.

He was one of only nine AIF members to have been awarded the Military Medal as well as the Military Cross and Bar.

Mrs Delisle said she had never met her father Percy's only younger brother — who

never married nor had children — but her research had shown he was a quiet, unassuming man.

"He was a man of action, not words," she said.

Those medals have been tracked down and now form part of a framed tribute to the war hero on display at the Gympie RSL Club.

Yesterday, Mr Parsons said Capt Harry had gone unrecognised for too long "and today we right that wrong".

Patrols had pushed forward in the darkness, the British barrage ceasing at midnight for a time to facilitate reconnaissance. Consolidation began under a fierce hostile bombardment. The intention was to hold the captured position by Vickers and Lewis-gun posts and a small infantry garrison; but the inevitable German counter-attack developed before the

preparations were completed. About 4 am on the 5th the 7th Brigade saw lines of Germans advancing up the slopes from Courcellette; the fire of the machine guns took heavy toll of them, and some came forward to surrender. Those who sought cover in shell-holes were bombed by Stokes mortars. The 27th Battalion, assisted by the 28th (W. Australia), then pushed forward and dug in round the windmill and on the O.G. 2 position near the Bapaumes road. On the right flank of the 26th Battalion, north of the Elbow, about one hundred Germans tried to bomb their way in shortly before 5 am. They were driven off by Lewis-gun fire, leaving ten prisoners behind - the Australians had now captured more than five hundred Germans.' (Official History of the War, Military Operations, France and Belgium, The Imperial War Museum, refers).

The Australians had successfully captured the crest of the Pozieres Ridge and they received the congratulations of Sir Douglas Haig and those of the commanders of the Army and the Corps.

THE BATTLE OF MENIN ROAD, SEPTEMBER 1917

The Second Army (including the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions) and Fifth Army were engaged during the Battle of Menin Road, 20th-25th September 1917. General Plumer had requested, and had had sanctioned by GHQ, a period of three weeks to prepare for Zero Hour on the 20th. This time had been calculated as necessary for the construction of gun emplacements for the bombardment, roads and railways (under the supervision of Major-General F.M. Glubb, Chief Engineer of the Second Army) to create good supply routes for the vast amount of ammunition needed for the assault, and the gathering of intelligence prior to the assault. It was in the latter capacity that Harry found himself occupied (see M.C. Recommendation) as Intelligence Officer of the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade.

This preparation and planning greatly contributed to the success of the attack to the extent that after five days of assault and German counter-attack, 'thus ended, with complete success except at Tower Hamlets, the first step in Sir Douglas Haig's first trial of step-by-step advance.... within seventy-two hours of the substantial capture of the final capture of the final objective on the 20th September, all six divisions which had made the main assault, those of the X and I Anzac Corps of the Second Army and the V Corps of the Fifth Army, had been relieved by the divisions in close reserve. The general opinion of the troops was that if every attack could be carried out so cleanly and be followed by relief so quickly, the men would be well content. During the period of the assault and counter-attacks, 3,243 prisoners had been taken and very heavy losses inflicted in killed (in the sector of the 23rd Division alone, astride the Menin road, over a thousand German dead were buried within the British lines) and wounded, in addition to the capture of a quantity of booty; but the outstanding gain was that the Germans had been driven from the major part of their key position on Gheluvelt plateau.' (Official History of the War, Military Operations, France and Belgium, The Imperial War Museum, refers).

Harry's compatriots in the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions combined, suffered approximately 4,125 officers and other ranks killed, wounded or missing between 20-25 September 1917.

THE BATTLE OF AMIENS, 8-11 AUGUST 1918

Harry continued in the same capacity for the 26th Battalion attached to the 7th A.I. Brigade H.Q. for the Battle of Amiens. On the 8th of August the 2nd Australian Division sent forward the 7th and 5th Brigades, the former consisting of the 26th, 27th and 28th Battalions. They achieved their objectives quickly and with relatively light casualties.

On the 11th of August, the last day of the offensive, Harry and the 26th were still in the thick

of it, 'a protective barrage was put down and consolidation was then begun. A further enemy attack, about 1.20pm by a battalion under a barrage, was stopped by machine-gun fire. During the rest of the day the Germans made frequent attempts to creep forward with bombs and machine guns up the complicated network of old trenches; in some cases they reached the line, only to be killed. By 4pm the objective of the 1st Australian Division round Lihons Hill and northward was firmly held without any gaps of sufficient width to cause uneasiness. It was found that the right flank was now five hundred yards ahead of the Canadian left.

The 2nd Australian Division was to gain a line from the left of 1st, round Rainecourt to the right flank of the 3rd, supposed to be at Avenue Cross.

The attack was made, simultaneously with the 1st Australian Division, by the 26th and 28th Battalions of the 7th Brigade and the 19th and the 20th of the 5th. No tanks were available, but the brigades had the same command of artillery support as those of the 1st Australian Division.' (Official History of the Great War, Military Operations, France and Belgium, The Imperial War Museum, refers). The objectives were carried and Harry distinguished himself once again just south of Framerville (see M.C. Second Award Bar Recommendation), when helping to co-ordinate the advance of the 7th and 5th Brigade battalions which had lost a little direction when they came under fire, *'the 19th Battalion reported itself there [at the objective] at 5am; the 20th was a little later, as it received fire not only from the front but also from Proyart to the north, which was still in the enemy's hands. In the sector of these two battalions he [the Germans] had replied to the barrage by turning 9 2-inch and 4 2-inch howitzers on to the village of Framerville and the orchard north-east of it.'* (Ibid).



Condition GVF. Sold with copied service papers, recommendations etc. Ex Spink 2008 (£2600 hammer). Captain Harry's medals, minus the MM, are displayed in the Gympie RSL Club. He was just one of just nine Australians awarded this combination of awards for WW1

A quite outstanding Australian M.M. for the Great War