

John Hewitson Smythe



Private (Pte) 1393 John Hewitson Smythe enlisted in the 39th Infantry Battalion in the 10th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division in Ballarat on 5 April 1916. He embarked overseas on 27 May and disembarked in Devonport, England on 18 July, where he joined the 10th (Brigade) Training Battalion at Durrington Camp.

After several months training, Pte Smythe departed England on 28 June 1917 and arrived in France the next day, where he was taken on strength of the 39th Battalion, in the field at La Douve Valley Camp, near Mount Kemmel, on 6 July 1917.

The battalion manned the front line near Warneton from 12 – 20 July, then returned to the reserve trenches in what was left of Messines. On the night of 3 October, the battalion moved up through Ypres to Zonnebeke in preparation for battle the next day.

The assault on Broodseinde Ridge began at 6.00 am on the morning of 4 October 1917 and, despite heavy overall casualties, was considered a great success.

The battalion's next action however, an attack on the village of Passchendaele, scheduled to follow quickly on 12 October 1917, was a disaster. The assembling soldiers were subjected to German gas and artillery fire as they moved up during the night of 11 October, and the ground, which had turned to quagmire due to the incessant rain, made the terrain impassable.

After the Battle of Third Ypres ground to its natural conclusion and things quietened down, the Australian divisions, including the 39th Battalion, remained in the Ypres and Messines sectors until late March 1918, when news of the German Spring Offensive on the Somme filtered through.

The 39th Battalion was one of many Australian units rushed south to help stem the advance. They reached the junction of the Ancre and Somme Rivers on 27 March and then established forward defensive positions near Morlancourt, where they helped to fight off several German attacks in the following days.

It was also while serving in this vicinity that Pte Smythe was wounded on 5 April (no details of his wounds were recorded). Tragically, as he was being carried to medical assistance, he was hit a second time and killed in action the very next day.

Private 1393 John Hewitson Smythe was buried in the Heilly Station Cemetery, Mericourt-l'Abbe, France later the same day.



*Pte Smythe's grave at Heilly Station Cemetery,
Mericourt-l'Abbe, France*

Name: Smythe, John Hewitson	
Service Number	1393
Date enlisted	5 April 1916
Place enlisted	Ballarat, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	39 th Infantry Battalion
Date and ship embarked for overseas	27 May 1916 HMAT A11 <i>Ascanius</i>
Previous military service	4 years senior cadets
Stated age/DOB (if known)	18 years 2 months
Place of birth	Ballarat, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Cook
Religion	Presbyterian
Next of kin and address	Smythe, Mr John, father, Mercer Street, Queenscliff, Victoria
Permanent address in Australia	c/- Mrs E Brown, 11 Mair Street, Ballarat, Victoria
Appearance	Fair complexion, black hair, grey eyes, height – 5 feet 7 inches, weight – 9 stone, 7 lbs, chest measurement – 31/34 inches
Final Rank	Private
Final Unit	39 th Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	France, Belgium
Fate	Killed in action
Date and place wounded	5 April 1918 Morlancourt, France
Nature of wounds	No details
Date and place died	6 April 1918 near Mericourt l'Abbe, France
Cemetery details	Heilly Station Cemetery, Mericourt-l'Abbe, France. Plot II, Row I, Grave 18
Honours/medals	British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Also listed on the Borough of Queenscliffe Roll of Honor, Ballarat Avenue of Honour and Broomfield State School Honor Roll.