

## **Horace Stanton Lynch**

### **An Analysis of His World War 1 Service**

Horace Stanton Lynch (known as Stan) was living on King Island, Tasmania, when he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in March 1915. During his service he was subject to severe disciplinary punishment and this paper, researched and written by Gary Barker, President of the King Island RSL Sub branch, is an analysis of his war life. Some believe Lynch was a coward, which is an unjust conclusion. What follows is a slightly abridged version of the Key Note speech presented by Warrant Officer David George, HMAS Cerberus, at the Island 2025 Anzac Day Dawn Service.

‘Some may remember that during the Boer War three Australians were committed for trial by Court Martial for murder, resulting in death sentences for two of them. The executions were conducted by a British unit in February 1902 and remains a contentious issue.

However, there is little known about a King Island soldier who was sentenced to death in 1916, while serving overseas with the First Australian Imperial Force. He was known as Stan and let me start by telling you about his early years. He was born in Tasmania in November 1894, the third youngest of 12 children. The family moved to King Island and became involved with farming.

They did not have it easy, as Stan was to find out in early 1914 when thrown from a horse. His Army Service Record’s state, ‘Right testicle removed by self, after kick from horse.’ This did not deter him from horses, as he stated he was a stockrider on his enlistment form.

He first tried to enlist in January 1915, even though he increased his age, he did not have his parent’s consent and was rejected. Two months later on the Eighth of March, with a letter of consent, he was enlisted as Private, Number 919, in the Twenty Sixth Infantry Battalion.

Six months later on the Seventeenth of September 1915, at Gallipoli, Stan was wounded in action, with a gunshot wound to the right foot. He spent the next five months in hospital including evacuations to Malta and England. While in England he went absent without leave for two days in February 1916. His punishment was 24 hours in detention and the loss of two days’ pay.

He returned to his unit in France, and in April 1916 Stan was tried by a Court Martial and charged with desertion from his Majesty’s Forces. He had been absent without leave for 12 days and was sentenced to 90 days punishment in a military prison. The sentence was confirmed by the General Officer Commanding the Second Australian Division; Stan served the full term.

Then in August 1916, while still on active service, Stan deserted for 25 days. He was arrested but escaped from custody in September and then was recaptured seven days later. Facing his second Court Martial he was charged with both offences, found guilty and sentenced to death on the Twenty Eighth of September 1916 with a recommendation to mercy. This was commuted to one year of hard labour by the General Officer Commanding the Fourth Army. However, this was four months later in

January 1917, and in the meantime Stan still believed he was to be executed. While in prison he was not paid.

Stan rejoined the Twenty Sixth Infantry Battalion in Belgium in September 1917. Nine days later he was wounded a second time; he was able to rejoin his unit six days later. Then in October 1917 he was over it, deserted again, and finally returned nine days later, was arrested and placed in custody.

In December 1917 he faced his third Court Martial charged with desertion and obtaining goods and money by false pretences. He was found guilty on both charges and sentenced to life in prison. He started to serve his sentence in the Military Prison at Dunkirk, when on the Twenty Third of January 1918 the Australian Commander in Chief, General Blamey, commuted the sentence to two years hard labour. At Dunkirk on the Third of February 1919, almost three months after the Armistice was signed, his sentence was suspended. He returned to Australia and was finally discharged on the Twenty Seventh of August 1919.

Stan spent more time in prison than fighting, and initially the Army refused to issue any war medals to him. Some may think Stan got all he deserved, but the reality is that he volunteered to serve, and did not deserve to be sentenced to death. He was wounded twice and paid highly for his offences as the loss of pay was around two years' worth. It is relevant to note that during World War One there were approximately Twenty Three Thousand Court Martials relating to desertion by Australian soldiers. The continuing use of trench warfare and senseless slaughter are the likely reasons so many deserted.

One hundred years later, Stan would have undoubtedly been diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Back then his actions would have been considered to be cowardice, as battle fatigue was so poorly understood.

Stan was certainly no coward and enlisted as a volunteer in the Second Australian Imperial Force. From 1940 until 1943 he was a Corporal in the Sixth Garrison Battalion in Tasmania and was not subject to any disciplinary action. Stan, pleasingly, was able to father his only child in 1921; he died in Burnie in 1972.

How times have changed, due to Hancock and Morant's executions during the Boer War, Australians serving overseas must be commanded by Australians, and no Australian Commander can sentence Service Personnel to death.

War is chaotic, and sometimes this results in human actions that couldn't be understood from an arm chair viewpoint. It shouldn't surprise you when I state, there are no arm chairs on the battlefield. What I am trying to say is unfortunately there is occasionally a one sided narrative being spread that might not be favourable to a serving member. I ask that you remember that this person or persons are volunteers like Stan and is doing what our government and we in the comfort of our armchairs expect them to do. So please, when you hear a story hold your judgement until all the facts are known, sometimes they are not.'