

George Taylor Stephens

Private (Pte) 6896 George Taylor Stephens enlisted in the 22nd Infantry Battalion in the 6th Infantry Brigade of the 2nd Australian Division in Brunswick on 27 February 1917, aged almost 44 years.

He embarked overseas on 11 May and disembarked at Devonport on 20 July, where he joined the 6th (Brigade) Training Battalion at Fovant Camp in Wiltshire.

After almost five months of training, Pte Stephens departed England on 4 December and landed in France the next day, where he was taken on strength of the 22nd Battalion, resting in the field near Mount Kemmel, on 11 December 1917.

After a long period of rest and following news of the Spring Offensive in late March 1918, the 22nd Battalion was rushed south and arrived at Dernancourt on 7 April, where battalion orders were issued and simply read, "*There will be no withdrawal. Every bit of ground will be fought for.*" As it turned out the main German offensive had already petered out by then.

On 19 May 1918, the 6th Brigade attacked the village of Ville-sur-Ancre to straighten out the front line around Morlancourt. The 22nd Battalion was heavily involved in the assault, which was considered a complete success with 330 Germans and 45 machine guns captured. Overall 22nd Battalion casualties totalled 195 (including 30 killed).

By 16 July the battalion had moved to the Aubigny area and while here it was subjected to a three-hour German mustard gas bombardment and sustained another 200 casualties.

The 22nd Battalion was down to only 120 riflemen when, on 18 August, it was ordered to capture the village of Herleville. Not surprisingly, the action only partially succeeded, and the battalion lost another 60 men – 19 killed and 41 wounded or captured.

Subsequently strengthened by reinforcements, the battalion was again ordered into the line on 27 August, where they helped to advance the line another 1,500 yards east of Cappy, and then another 2,000 yards the next day to Black Wood.

On 31 August the battalion moved to a support position near Clery-sur-Somme, north-west of Mont St Quentin. Given its depleted state the 22nd Battalion was the 6th Brigade reserve for the Australian assault on 1 September, so they were mainly involved in carrying duties during the famous attack.

The battalion then took part in the last action fought by the AIF on the Western Front, the Battle of Montbrehain, on 5 October 1918. In a short, but difficult fight, all the objectives were achieved by around 10.00 am, for the loss of 87 battalion casualties (22 killed).

That night, the battalion left the line for the final time and Pte Stephens was subsequently granted leave in England from 2 – 22 December 1918.

He returned to England on 16 May 1919 and embarked for Australia on 7 July.

Private 6896 George Taylor Stephens disembarked in Melbourne on 5 September, where he was discharged from the AIF on 5 October 1919.

Name: Stephens, George Taylor	
Service Number	6896
Date enlisted	27 February 1917
Place enlisted	Brunswick, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	22 nd Infantry Battalion
Date and ship embarked for overseas	11 May 1917 HMAT A11 <i>Ascanius</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	43 years 6 months
Place of birth	Ballarat, Victoria
Marital status	Married
Occupation	Fisherman
Religion	Methodist
Next of kin and address	Stephens, Mrs May, wife, Hobson Street, Queenscliff, Victoria
Permanent address	Hobson Street, Queenscliff, Victoria
Appearance	Fair complexion, light brown hair, blue eyes, height – 5 feet 7 inches, weight – 8 stone, 12 lbs, chest measurement – 34/37 inches
Final Rank	Private
Final Unit	22 nd Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and ship embarked for Australia	7 July 1919 HT <i>Chemnitz</i>
Date discharged	5 October 1919
Nature of discharge	Termination of Period of Enlistment
Honours/medals	British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Died 19 April 1925 (at sea). Father of Francis George Stephens (SN 2528).