

Herbert Oswald Ash



Private (Pte) 3457 Herbert Oswald Ash enlisted in the 22nd Battalion in Geelong on 12 July 1915. He embarked overseas on 5 January 1916 and disembarked in Egypt in early February, where he was transferred and taken on strength of the 58th Infantry Battalion in the 15th Infantry Brigade of the 5th Australian Division at Tel el Kebir on 15 March.

The battalion departed Egypt on 17 June and disembarked in Marseilles on 23 June, where they entrained for the north and experienced their first taste of battle on the Western Front at Fromelles on 19 July. Although in reserve and providing medical stretcher parties initially, the battalion was eventually committed to the failed attack for the loss of 247 casualties (80 killed or missing).

Pte Ash was hospitalised at the 38th Casualty Clearing Station with mumps from 20 February – 13 March 1917, during which time the Germans withdrew their defences to newly prepared positions on the Hindenburg Line. A cautious allied advance followed and, during the Second Battle of Bullecourt, the 58th Battalion successfully defended earlier gains against German counterattacks between 10 – 13 May, at a cost of 242 men (60 killed or missing).

Pte Ash enjoyed leave in England from 26 August – 8 September, after which the battalion moved north to the Ypres sector in Belgium. On 26 September they were involved in the Battle of Polygon Wood, which was considered a success, albeit for the loss to the battalion of another 290 casualties.

Between 2 – 28 October, Pte Ash was detached to 5th Division Headquarters to serve as groom to Major Freeman, after which he was promoted to Driver (Dvr) on 21 February 1918.

In response to the German Spring Offensive, on 27 March the 5th Division moved south and the 58th Battalion went into defensive positions along the Somme Canal on 31 March.

On the night of 24 April, the battalion participated in the daring Australian night counterattack that re-captured Villers-Bretonneux two days later, at the cost of 69 casualties (14 killed).

On 4 July 1918, during the attack on le Hamel to the south, the 15th Brigade, including the 58th Battalion, was involved in a feint north of the Somme at Ville sur Ancre. They achieved all their objectives and captured around 30 German prisoners and ten machine guns, for the loss of 40 casualties, including ten killed.

During the allies' main offensive from Amiens on 8 August, the 5th Division "passed through" the 3rd Division and continued the advance for several kilometres, capturing the villages of Harbonnières and Vauvillers, and many prisoners and guns. The Germans were now on the back foot and the Australians continued east in pursuit. By late August, they had reached the fortified town of Peronne, which the 58th Battalion helped to capture on 1 September 1918, for the loss of 85 casualties.

Dvr Ash was granted leave in England from 28 September – 15 October then returned to France, where the 58th Battalion had already left the line for the last time.

He then contracted influenza and was hospitalised at the 47th Casualty Clearing Station at Maubeuge on 11 December but ultimately died of his illness there on 18 December.

Driver 3457 Herbert Oswald Ash was later buried in the Maubeuge Centre Cemetery, France.



Dvr Herbert Oswald Ash's grave at Maubeuge Cemetery, France

Name: Ash, Herbert Oswald	
Service Number	3457
Date enlisted	12 July 1915
Place enlisted	Geelong, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	22 nd Infantry Battalion
Date and ship embarked for overseas	5 January 1916 HMAT A19 <i>Afric</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	23 years 11 months (12/7/1891)
Place of birth	Leopold, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Gardener
Religion	Methodist
Next of kin and address	Ash, Mr Jabez, father, Leopold, Victoria
Permanent address	Leopold, Victoria
Appearance	Fresh complexion, light brown hair, brown eyes, height – 5 feet 9 inches, weight – 10 stone, 10 lbs, chest measurement – 37 inches
Final Rank	Driver
Final Unit	58 th Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	Egypt, France, Belgium
Fate	Died of illness (influenza)
Date and place died	18 December 1918 47 th Casualty Clearing Station, Maubeuge, France
Cemetery details	Maubeuge Centre Cemetery, Maubeuge, France. Row B, Grave 38
Honours/medals	British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Also remembered on the Leopold State School Honor Roll, Leopold & District Honor Roll, Leopold War Memorial, Geelong & District Peace Memorial and East Geelong, St Albans & Moolap War Memorial.