

James Otto Bell

Private (Pte) 94 James Otto Bell enlisted in the 21st Infantry Battalion in the 6th Infantry Brigade of the 2nd Australian Division in Melbourne on 14 January 1915. He embarked overseas on 10 May and disembarked in Egypt in mid-June.

After several weeks training, the 21st Battalion embarked for Gallipoli on board the HMT *Southland* on 29 August. While still about 56 km from Lemnos, the *Southland* was torpedoed by the German submarine *UB-14* on 2 September and had to be abandoned. While the ship didn't sink immediately and most of the 1,400 men on board were rescued, around 40 men lost their lives, many in the original torpedo explosion.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART09829

The sinking of the HMT Southland in the Aegean Sea, with the soldiers from 2nd Australian Division waiting for lifeboats or jumping overboard

The survivors arrived at Gallipoli on 7 September, where the battalion moved into the quieter northern section of the front line. The 21st Battalion diary of 13 September stated that “*the trenches are infested with vermin, fleas and lice...*” and that “*sanitary arrangements in regard to this section need particular care...*”. The battalion subsequently evacuated Gallipoli in late December and arrived back in Egypt on 27 December.

The battalion departed Egypt on 19 March and disembarked in Marseilles on 26 March, where they entrained to the Hazebrouck region in the north and spent several weeks in and out of the line around Fleurbaix.

The battalion then headed south to the Somme from 8 July, which they reached on 18 July. The 2nd Division took over the Pozieres front on 27 July and the 21st Battalion entered the line on 29 July. Used mainly in a defensive role, the battalion nevertheless sustained 289 casualties, one of whom was Pte Bell who sustained a shrapnel wound to his chest on 30 July.

He was evacuated to the 3rd Canadian General Hospital at Camiers from 31 July – 5 August and rejoined the battalion on 24 August.

Just two days later, the 21st Battalion moved back into the line for an assault on the heavily fortified Mouquet Farm on 26 August. The attack failed and the battalion sustained a further 391 casualties (171 killed/missing) then left the line.

After a rest period in Flanders until late October, the battalion again headed south and moved into the front line near Flers on 3 November, where they experienced the heavy, energy sapping mud for the first time. It was while on duty here that Pte Bell sustained a gunshot wound to his buttock on 5 November.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

E00576

Australian and NZ soldiers on what was a sunken road near Flers, November 1916

He was evacuated to the 36th Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly but ultimately died there of his wounds later the same day.

Private 94 James Otto Bell was buried in the Heilly Station Cemetery at Mericourt-L'Abbe, France on 5 November 1916.

Name: Bell, James Otto	
Service Number	94
Date enlisted	14 January 1915
Place enlisted	Melbourne, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	21 st Infantry Battalion
Date and ship embarked for overseas	10 May 1915 HMAT A38 <i>Ulysses</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	19 years 8 months
Place of birth	Sheffield, England
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Farm labourer
Religion	Church of England
Next of kin and address	Bell, Mr William, father, 35 Cobden View Road, Crookes, Sheffield, England
Permanent address	Wallington, Victoria
Appearance	Ruddy complexion, dark brown hair, brown eyes, height – 5 feet 5 ³ / ₄ inches, weight – 9 stone, 6 lbs, chest measurement – 33/35 inches
Final Rank	Private
Final Unit	21 st Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	Egypt, Gallipoli, France
Fate	Died of wounds
Date and place wounded	30 July 1916 Poizieres, France
Nature of wounds	Shrapnel wound to chest
Date and place wounded (2)	5 November 1916 near Flers, France
Nature of wounds (2)	Gunshot wound to buttock
Date and place died	5 November 1916 36 th Casualty Clearing Station, Heilly, France
Cemetery details	Heilly Station Cemetery, Meri-court-L'Abbe, France. Plot V, Row F, Grave 2
Honours/medals	1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Also remembered on the Leopold War Memorial