

Owen Biglow Cain



Private (Pte) 2522 Owen Biglow Cain enlisted in the 3rd Pioneer Battalion in the 3rd Australian Division in Melbourne on 4 September 1916. He embarked overseas on 21 October and disembarked in Plymouth on 28 December. During the voyage, Pte Cain was absent without leave on 8 December and was subsequently awarded seven days detention.

After spending two months with the Pioneer Training Battalion, he sailed for France on 28 February 1917. He landed the next day, where he was taken on strength of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion at Armentieres on 16 April.

Pioneer Battalions were infantry with light military combat engineer skills. Among other tasks, they constructed defensive positions, command posts and dugouts, prepared barbed wire defences and, where necessary, fought alongside the infantry.

In the lead up to the Battle of Messines, between 2 – 6 June the pioneers prepared new communication trenches, trench mortar emplacements and undertook road repairs in the area, for the loss of 42 casualties (three killed). During the battle itself, from 7 – 9 June the pioneers were attached to the assaulting infantry to act as anti-aircraft gunners and to maintain the water supply, often under direct artillery and gas attacks, and they sustained another 155 casualties (13 killed).

The battalion moved through Ypres to the Zonnebeke area in early October, where they repaired roads and tracks along which ammunition and other vital supplies for the front needed to travel. During the Battle of Broodseinde Ridge on 4 October, the battalion again provided extra Lewis gunners to act in an anti-aircraft capacity.

In the days following, the pioneers were heavily involved in salvaging significant arms and materials from the captured German supply dumps. Overall casualties between 4 – 8 October were relatively light at 26, with one man killed.

The battalion wintered around Messines, during which time it provided reinforcements to the Australian tunnelling companies and helped to construct and maintain the light rail systems.

In early 1918, the battalion took part in efforts to blunt the German spring offensive, serving around Heilly and Ribemont between March and May.

In the lead up to the allied offensive from Amiens, Pte Biglow was with a group of pioneers preparing to bridge the Somme River near Corbie when he was severely gassed on 6 August 1918.



Members of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion repairing a bridge on the Somme

He was evacuated to the 7th Canadian Stationary Hospital at Boulogne from 8 – 16 August, then transferred to the 83rd General Hospital (also at Boulogne) between 16 – 25 August, when he was conveyed to England and was admitted to the 4th London General Hospital later the same day.

He was discharged from hospital on 10 January 1919 and granted leave from 22 January – 5 February, then embarked for return to Australia on 1 April.

Private 2522 Owen Biglow Cain disembarked in Melbourne on 16 May, where he was medically discharged from the AIF on 23 June 1919.

Name: Cain, Owen Biglow	
Service Number	2522
Date enlisted	4 September 1916
Place enlisted	Melbourne, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	3 rd Pioneer Infantry Battalion
Previous military service	Australian Field Artillery – 2 years
Date and ship embarked for overseas	21 October 1916 HMAT A16 <i>Port Melbourne</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	22 years 4 months
Place of birth	Rye, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Woodcutter
Religion	Roman Catholic
Next of kin and address	Cain, Mr Michael, father, Rye, Victoria
Permanent address	Rye, Victoria
Appearance	Medium complexion, brown hair, blue eyes, height – 5 feet 9 inches, weight – 9 stone, 3 lbs, chest measurement – 33/36 inches
Final Rank	Private
Final Unit	3 rd Pioneer Battalion
Theatres of war served in	France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and place wounded	6 August 1918 near Corbie, France
Nature of wounds	Gassed
Date and ship embarked for Australia	1 April 1919 HT <i>Shropshire</i>
Date discharged	23 June 1919
Nature of discharge	Medically Unfit (wounds)
Honours/medals	British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Connection to Leopold not known. Also remembered on the Rye & District Honor Roll and Rye State School Roll of Honor.