

Richard Ernest Trebilcock MC



Richard Ernest Trebilcock was commissioned as a Captain (Capt) in the AIF on 1 May 1916. Allocated to the 38th Infantry Battalion in the 10th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division in Bendigo, he embarked overseas on 20 June and disembarked in Plymouth on 10 August.

The battalion left England on 22 November and landed in France the next day, where they acclimatised at Armentieres and moved into the front line at Houplines for the first time on 1 December 1916. They alternated in and out of this “quiet” sector for the next two months, during which time Capt Trebilcock also spent a week at the 11th Field Ambulance with diarrhoea between 21 – 28 January 1917.

In February 1917, the 38th Battalion moved into the front line at Bois Grenier and, on the morning of 27 February, conducted a large-scale trench raid on the German lines, under the cover of artillery fire.

At 12.30 am, the force of 650 Australians left their trenches and, in the words of the 38th Battalion diary, “...the raiding battalion attacked the German line preceded by a heavy barrage. They penetrated to the third line and completed the destruction caused by the artillery, inflicting heavy casualties and bringing back one Machine Gun, one Searchlight and seventeen prisoners. Enemy dead were estimated at about 200. 38th casualties consisted of 16 O.R's (other ranks) killed or missing, 3 Officers and 42 O.R. wounded.”

The battalion next moved north to Belgium in early June in preparation for the attack on Messines Ridge on 7 June. At 3.10 am, 19 massive mines detonated under the German lines and the allies attacked and captured the ground in what was considered a well-planned attack. Capt Trebilcock reported a slight wound, but he remained at duty and there are no details.

For his work at Messines, Capt Trebilcock was recommended for, and later awarded, the Military Cross (MC) on 25 August 1917. The citation read:

“For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He led his company with great dash to its objective, greatly inspiring the men by his disregard of danger and his cheerfulness under heavy fire, and other trying conditions. He consolidated and held his post for over two days, by his determination and courage greatly assisting the efficient conduct of the whole operation”.

The 38th Battalion moved to the Zonnebeke area on 2 October in preparation for an attack on Broodseinde Ridge. The assault began at 6.00 am on the morning of 4 October and despite heavy casualties was also considered a success. The 38th Battalion suffered 184 casualties (34 killed), achieved all their objectives and captured about 300 German prisoners.

The battalion's next action however, an attack on the village of Passchendaele, which followed quickly on 12 October 1917, was a disaster. The assembled soldiers were subjected to German artillery fire while they waited then, once the attack commenced, were pinned by machine gun fire and hindered by deep mud, so made no headway at all, at the cost of another 381 casualties, one of whom was Capt Trebilcock, who sustained gunshot wounds to his left arm and leg.

He was initially evacuated to the 11th Field Ambulance between 15 – 19 October, then the 2nd Red Cross Hospital at Rouen from 19 – 23 October, before being transferred to England and admitted to the 3rd London General Hospital between 24 October – 26 December 1917.

He returned to France on 10 January 1918, where he rejoined the 38th Battalion at rest near Bailleul on 15 January.

He was granted leave in England from 8 March – 12 April, and rejoined the battalion near Buire sur Ancre where, according to the 38th Battalion unit diary, the German artillery fire was particularly heavy.

At some point after that, Capt Trebilcock suffered from acute arsenic poisoning, possibly from German gas (although his record is silent as to cause) and he was evacuated sick to the 20th Casualty Clearing Station on 28 April.

He was subsequently admitted to the 1st Red Cross Hospital at Le Touquet from 4 – 12 May, then transferred to England and admitted to the 3rd London General Hospital between 12 May – 11 July.

After his discharge, he spent several weeks at Sutton Veny Camp but never recovered from his poisoning and he embarked for return to Australia on 19 October 1918.

Captain Richard Ernest Trebilcock MC disembarked in Melbourne on 27 December, where his Appointment as a Commissioned Officer in the AIF was terminated on 13 February 1919.

Name: Trebilcock, Richard Ernest	
Date enlisted	1 May 1916
Place enlisted	Bendigo, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Captain
Initial Unit	38 th Infantry Battalion
Previous military service	67 th Infantry Battalion, CMF (serving), Victorian Rangers, Officer Training Scheme, Duntroon (April 1916)
Date and ship embarked for overseas	20 June 1916 HMAS A54 <i>Runic</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	35 years 10 months (30/6/1880)
Place of birth	Ballarat, Victoria
Marital status	Married
Occupation	Solicitor
Religion	Church of England
Next of kin and address	Trebilcock, Mrs Hester, wife, "Severnside", Malvern Road, East Malvern, Victoria
Permanent address	Kerang, Victoria
Appearance	Dark complexion, black hair, brown eyes, height – 5 feet 7 ½ inches, weight – 7 stone, 14 lbs, chest measurement – 31/34 inches
Final Rank	Captain
Final Unit	38 th Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and place wounded	12 October 1917 Passchendaele, Belgium
Nature of wounds	Gunshot wounds to left arm and leg
Date and ship embarked for Australia	19 October 1918 HT <i>Sardinia</i>
Date discharged	13 February 1919
Nature of discharge	Appointment Terminated (medically unfit – arsenic poisoning & gastritis)
Honours/medals	Military Cross, British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Father was a former Bellarine Shire President. Home service WW2 (SN V362853). Also remembered on the Leopold State School Honor Roll, Leopold War Memorial, Geelong College Roll of Honour, Law Institute of Victoria Roll of Honour and the Bendigo Soldiers Memorial Institute Honor Roll