

## **George Stephenson Pigdon**

Private (Pte) 2543 George Stephenson Pigdon enlisted in the 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion in the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Division at Geelong on 27 April 1916.

He embarked overseas on 7 September and disembarked in Plymouth on 29 October, where he joined the 12<sup>th</sup> (Brigade) Training Battalion at Codford Camp.

He left England on 21 December and landed in France the next day, where he was taken on strength of the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion, resting at Mametz Camp, on 27 January 1917, one of 110 reinforcements received that day.

As the Australians cautiously advanced in the wake of the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line in late March, the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion entered the area near Noreuil on 7 April. They were scheduled to attack the new line at Bullecourt on 10 April, but the assault was called off at the last minute.

The hastily and poorly planned attack nevertheless went ahead the next day, without the benefit of an artillery barrage and instead using British tanks as support, most of which failed to even make it to the start line.

The result was inevitable and the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion, in the vanguard of the attack, lost 43 men killed, 138 missing (many of whom became prisoners of war) and 206 wounded, one of whom was Pte Pigdon who received a shrapnel wound to his left leg on 11 April.

He was evacuated to the 1<sup>st</sup> General Hospital at Etretat from 13 – 21 April, then spent two months at the 4<sup>th</sup> Division Base Depot at le Havre, before he rejoined the battalion at Doulieu on 19 July 1917.

The 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved to Belgium in September and, although 4<sup>th</sup> Division reserve for the actual attack at Polygon Wood on 26 September, they manned the newly acquired front line near Zonnebeke until 28 September.

On 10 October the battalion moved back into the line near Zonnebeke, where it was also in reserve for the attack on Passchendaele Ridge on 12 October 1917. Despite that the battalion nevertheless sustained 137 casualties (13 killed).

The Australians remained in the Ypres and Messines area for the remainder of 1917 and early 1918, when news of the German Spring Offensive on the Somme filtered through in late March.

They were placed on alert to move at a few hours' notice, and the situation remained unclear even as the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved 130 km south on 28 March, and into the new front line near Dernancourt, south-west of Albert (now in German hands) on 30 March 1918. The battalion took up defensive positions along 2 km of the railway line embankment that extended from Albert and waited.

Two days later, on 1 April 1918, and without any preliminary bombardment, about 140 Germans tested the Australian line. The resultant defensive fire was so withering that the attack was broken in minutes. Not many of the Germans were observed to make it back, while six were captured, for the cost of four wounded Australians.

On 3 April, the Germans tried again, this time preceded by a heavy artillery bombardment. A “spirited” infantry attack followed but was defeated within 10 minutes. Overall, the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion sustained around 50 casualties, mostly from the earlier artillery fire, and was relieved later that night.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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*Diorama at the AWM showing Dernancourt and the railway cutting that formed the Australian line, April 1918*

While making their way to the reserve trenches at Lavieville two days later, the battalion was caught in a German artillery barrage which caused 25 casualties, one of whom was Pte Pigdon who sustained shrapnel wounds to his buttocks, left hand and left shoulder on 5 April.

He was evacuated to the 4<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Camiers between 7 – 11 April, then transferred to England, where he was admitted to the 4<sup>th</sup> Southern General Hospital at Plymouth from 12 April – 17 May, when he was granted leave until 6 June.

He later came down with a bout of dysentery and was hospitalised at the Sutton Veny Military Hospital from 18 July – 4 September, after which he was sent to the Overseas Training Brigade at Leighton Deverill to prepare for a return to France.

The signing of the Armistice intervened and instead he embarked for return to Australia on 11 December 1918.

Private 2543 George Stephenson Pigdon disembarked in Melbourne on 30 January, where he was medically discharged from the AIF on 16 May 1919.

Name: Pigdon, George Stephenson	
Service Number	2543
Date enlisted	27 April 1916
Place enlisted	Geelong, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	46 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion
Date and ship embarked for overseas	7 September 1916 HMAT A15 <i>Port Sydney</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	24 years
Place of birth	St Leonards, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Labourer
Religion	Church of England
Next of kin and address	Pigdon, Mr James, father, St Leonards, Victoria
Permanent address	St Leonards, Victoria
Appearance	Fair complexion, brown hair, blue eyes, height – 5 feet 6 ½ inches, weight – 10 stone, 7 lbs, chest measurement – 35/38 inches
Final Rank	Private
Final Unit	46 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and place wounded	11 April 1917 Bullecourt, France
Nature of wounds	Shrapnel wound to left leg
Date and place wounded (2)	5 April 1918 Lavieville, France
Nature of wounds (2)	Shrapnel wounds to buttocks, left hand and left shoulder
Date and ship embarked for Australia	11 December 1918 HT <i>Saxon</i>
Date discharged	16 May 1919
Nature of discharge	Medically Unfit (wounds)
Honours/medals	British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Died 26 August 1959. Remembered on the St Leonards Honor Roll, St Paul's Anglican Church Honor Roll, Portarlington Honor Roll and Portarlington War Memorial.