

William Alexander (Alex) Medcalf MM



Private 4847 William Alexander (Alex) Medcalf enlisted in the 7th Infantry Battalion in Inglewood on 15 July 1915, aged almost 20 years.

He embarked overseas on 7 March 1916 and disembarked in Egypt in early April, where he was re-mustered as a Gunner (Gnr) and transferred to the 4th Australian Division Artillery Details at Serapeum on 16 April.

He departed Egypt on 7 June and landed at Marseilles on 15 June, then entrained north to Caestre, where he was taken on strength of the 12th Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) of the 4th Australian Division on 30 June 1916.

The brigade moved into the front line for the first time – near Fleurbaix on 3 July – and later provided fire support for the 5th Australian Division's unsuccessful assault on Fromelles between 16 – 22 July.

Gnr Medcalf spent a week at the 10th Stationary Hospital at St Omer with venereal disease from 19 – 26 August, then rejoined his unit.

In February 1917, as the Germans withdrew to the Hindenburg Line, the brigade moved to Frechencourt, where Gnr Medcalf was absent without leave on 22 – 23 February. He was awarded 14 days Field Punishment No. 2 (which involved additional work duties, sometimes under restraint) and docked 16 days' pay as a result.

The brigade provided fire support for the Australian capture of Lagnicourt in March 1917, but artillery was not required for the first attack on Bullecourt on 11 April, which ended in disaster, although the 12th FAB provided fire support for the second attempt on 3 May.



The 12th Australian Field Artillery Brigade preparing an 18-pounder battery site behind Vaulx, for registration on Lagnicourt, 20 March 1917.

The brigade moved north to Nieuport on the Belgian coast during July 1917 in support of British infantry in that sector in the early stages of the Third Battle of Ypres.

Later during Third Ypres, the brigade's wagon lines were bombed by German aircraft near Reninghelst on 19 October (five men killed and four wounded) and again on 21 October, when two horses were killed, and one man and four horses wounded. The brigade then moved to La Clytte and took over the front line from the 103rd Brigade, Royal Field Artillery on 24 October where they again supported the British infantry in the area.

Gnr Medcalf attended the 2nd British Army Artillery School in Belgium between 9 December – 6 January 1918, then was detached to No. 3 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps between 11 – 15 February (for radio co-ordination training between aircraft and the artillery).

During the second phase of the German Spring Offensive, the 12th FAB provided fire support for Canadian and Australian infantry as they held off the German thrust south of Hazebrouck during April 1918.

Gnr Medcalf absented himself without leave from 2 – 6 June, for which he was awarded ten days Field Punishment No. 2 and docked 15 days' pay, and then again from 14 – 16 July, for which he was given 15 days Field Punishment No. 2 and docked 18 days' pay.

In early August 1918, the 12th FAB moved south to the Somme and, on 8 August, provided protective barrages for the 4th Division near Hamelet. The offensive was a complete success, and the forward movement of all units was quite rapid compared to previous engagements.

The brigade next covered the advance on Proyart on 15 August, then the 1st Division's attack on Chuignes on 23 August and the 5th Division's at Peronne on 31 August. For his actions during the August offensive, Gnr Medcalf was awarded the Military Medal on 27 August, but unfortunately the relevant citation could not be found in his service record.

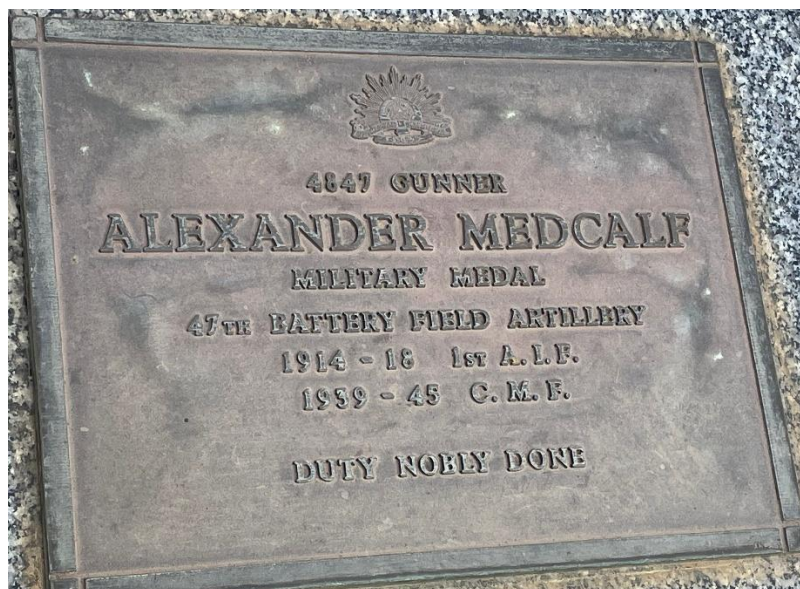
On 18 September, the 12th FAB supported the 4th Division's attack on the Hindenburg Outpost Line near Jeancourt, then moved into reserve for a week. On 26 September they moved to new positions near Hargicourt in preparation for the 30th American and 5th Australian Division's successful attack on the Hindenburg Line at Bellicourt three days later.

While the Australian infantry divisions were progressively relieved from 1 October, the field artillery units continued forward with the general allied advance. The 12th FAB moved to Joncourt for the 2nd Division's attack on Montbrehain on 5 October – the last by Australian infantry on the western front – then provided direct fire support for an American attack on Premont on 8 October.

They continued to move eastwards through Busigny on 10 October, where they covered another American advance during 17 – 18 October, after which they left the front line for good.

Gnr Medcalf was absent without leave on 2 November and awarded five days Field Punishment No. 2, after which he was granted leave in England from 5 – 31 December 1918.

On his return to France, he was hospitalised at the 13th Casualty Clearing Station at Ascq between 13 – 28 February 1919, then transferred to the 7th Stationary Hospital from 4 – 8 March, diagnosed with inflamed connective tissue in his right arm, which later turned septic.



Inglewood Cemetery

He was transferred to England and admitted to the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth between 8 – 17 March, then embarked for return to Australia on 5 April.

Gunner 4847 William Alexander (Alex) Medcalf MM disembarked in Melbourne on 18 May, where he was medically discharged from the AIF on 2 July 1919.

Name: Medcalf, William Alexander (Alex)	
Service Number	4847
Date enlisted	15 July 1915
Place enlisted	Inglewood, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	7 th Infantry Battalion
Date and ship embarked for overseas	7 March 1916 HMAT A18 <i>Wiltshire</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	19 years 11 months (22 July 1895)
Place of birth	Inglewood, Victoria
Marital status	Married
Occupation	Labourer
Religion	Church of England
Next of kin and address	Medcalf, Mrs May, wife, Glenalbyn, Victoria
Permanent address	Glenalbyn, Victoria
Appearance	Fair complexion, light brown hair, greenish brown eyes, height – 5 feet 5 ¾ inches, weight – 8 stone, 10 lbs, chest measurement – 35/37 inches
Final Rank	Gunner
Final Unit	12 th Field Artillery Brigade
Theatres of war served in	France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and ship embarked for Australia	5 April 1919 HT <i>Armagh</i>
Date discharged	2 July 1919
Nature of discharge	Medically Unfit (septic right wrist)
Honours/medals	Military Medal, British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Brother of Cecil Medcalf MM & Alwyn Medcalf (RAN). Home Service WW2 (SN V17548). Died 25 October 1978. Remembered on the Glenalbyn District Honor Roll and Inglewood War Memorial.