

Hugh Coyle Prendergast

Private (Pte) 556 Hugh Coyle Prendergast enlisted in the 11th Machine Gun (MG) Company in the 11th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division at Charleville on 16 September 1916. He embarked overseas on 14 February 1917 and disembarked in Plymouth on 11 April, where he joined the Australian Machine Gun Training Depot at Belton Park, Grantham.

MG Companies were equipped with 16 Vickers medium machine guns, which were mounted on tripods and served by crews of between three and six. They were not easily portable and were generally used in prepared, fixed positions when in the front line.

He departed England on 5 June and arrived in France the next day, where he was taken on strength of the 11th MG Company, in camp at Neuve Eglise, on 17 June 1917.

Pte Prendergast contracted influenza and was evacuated to the 15th Casualty Clearing Station from 26 September – 2 October, then rejoined his unit at Brandhoek on 8 October. The 11th MG Company moved east of Ypres on 9 October in preparation for the 3rd Division's unsuccessful attack on Passchendaele a few days' later.

During the attack on 12 October, the company provided a machine gun barrage during the opening assault and then flanking cover throughout the engagement. They fired over 60,000 rounds and remained in the line until 21 October, when replaced by the 10th Canadian MG Company, having lost four machine guns and 60 men, including 23 killed or missing.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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The fighting conditions in front of Passchendaele, 12 October 1917

Pte Prendergast's influenza flared up again on 12 November and he was treated at the 39th Stationary Hospital at Aire between 12 – 21 November, then transferred to the 2nd Canadian Stationary Hospital at Outreau until 17 December. He spent a couple of weeks at the 1st Convalescent Depot at Boulogne before eventually rejoining his unit at Locre on 8 January 1918.

On 28 January, the 11th MG Company relieved the 22nd MG Company in the front line near Ploegsteert Wood. During the relief they suffered eleven casualties, one of whom was Pte Prendergast who sustained a gunshot wound to his left thigh. He was treated at the 9th Field Ambulance between 2 – 10 February, when he rejoined the unit, before being granted leave in France from 18 February – 5 March 1918.

As news of the German Spring Offensive on the Somme began to filter through from 21 March, the Australian units in the north were placed on alert to move at 24 hours' notice. At around the same time, the machine gun companies of the 3rd Division were amalgamated to form the 3rd Machine Gun Battalion.

The battalion entrained for the south from 26 March and established defensive positions between Sailly le Sec and Mericourt l'Abbe the following day. They helped to repel an enemy attack and came under heavy German artillery fire on 31 March. They remained in these positions throughout April, as the German offensive eventually petered out.

Pte Prendergast came down with influenza again on 15 May. He was evacuated to the 61st (British) Casualty Clearing Station until 19 May, when he was transferred to the 56th General Hospital at Etaples from 19 – 26 May, then rejoined the battalion at Villers-Bretonneux on 8 June.

The 3rd MG Battalion provided infantry support for the Australian and American attack on le Hamel on 4 July, for the loss of three men killed and ten wounded, one of whom was Pte Prendergast who sustained a shrapnel wound to his right forearm.

He was evacuated to the 6th General Hospital in Rouen from 5 – 13 July, then transferred to England and admitted to the 3rd Southern General Hospital in Oxford between 14 – 26 July, after which he was granted leave in England until 9 August.

He spent the next three months at various camps in Wiltshire, before eventually returning to France on 29 November – after the war had ended – and he rejoined the 3rd MG Battalion at Hornoy on 2 December 1918.

He left France for the last time on 14 April 1919 and embarked for return to Australia on 27 May.

Private 556 Hugh Coyle Prendergast disembarked in Sydney on 24 July, where he was discharged from the AIF on 4 September 1919.

Name: Prendergast, Hugh Coyle	
Service Number	556
Date enlisted	16 September 1916
Place enlisted	Charleville, Queensland
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	11 th Machine Gun Company
Date and ship embarked for overseas	14 February 1917 RMS <i>Osterley</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	27 years 9 months
Place of birth	Maude, NSW
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Labourer
Religion	Roman Catholic
Next of kin and address	Prendergast, Mrs Catherine, mother, Hay, NSW
Permanent address	Hay, NSW
Appearance	Ruddy complexion, brown hair, blue eyes, height – 5 feet 8 ½ inches, weight – 9 stone, 6 lbs, chest measurement – 35/37 inches
Final Rank	Private
Final Unit	3 rd Machine Gun Battalion
Theatres of war served in	France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and place wounded	28 January 1918 near Ploegsteert Wood, Belgium
Nature of wounds	Gunshot wound to left thigh
Date and place wounded (2)	4 July 1918 Le Hamel, France
Nature of wounds (2)	Shrapnel wound to right forearm
Date and ship embarked for Australia	27 May 1919 HT <i>Rio Pardo</i>
Date discharged	4 September 1919
Nature of discharge	Termination of Period of Enlistment
Honours/medals	British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Died 22 September 1953.

