



Major Rupert Reginald HOCKLEY DSO

[1878 – 1917]



2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion

Rupert Reginald Hockley was born in Maryborough on 1 February 1878, the third of three children of James Hockley (ironmonger) and Elizabeth Hockley (nee Skinnerty).

He was educated at Maryborough Grammar School before being employed in the family firm. He was manager of Hockley's Ltd, which operated an engineering foundry and made Albion stoves.

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Hockley was a member of the Technical College Committee, was popular in business and private life. He was very social, being frequently reported in Queensland newspapers during the period 1900 - 1914.

He served in the militia (Wide Bay Infantry) for nineteen years, was the holder of a Hythe Certificate¹ and held the rank of Captain prior to joining the AIF.

Hockley was appointed to the AIF as Captain, 31st Battalion on 30 August 1915 and promoted Major on 18 October 1915 (in Egypt).

31st Battalion did not leave Victoria for Egypt until 9 November 1915 and was therefore not deployed to the Gallipoli campaign. On arrival in Egypt, the battalion undertook canal protection duties and soon after began training for operations in France.



31st Battalion officers en-route to Egypt. Captain Hockley is second from left, second row (circled)

The AIF was expanded and reorganised after the withdrawal from Gallipoli. This caused much turbulence, including the need to establish new specialised units and train the men for them. Hockley was transferred from 31st Battalion to the 2nd Pioneer Battalion and promoted to Major - arriving as Second-in-Command on 19 March 1916.

The first major battle for the unit and for Hockley was part of the Battle of the Somme, as the Australian divisions were tasked to capture Pozieres and Pozieres Heights in late July 1916. Pioneers were engaged in various repair and construction tasks. The constant shellfire made these tasks very hazardous. After this battle the Australian troops were deployed to the quieter Ypres area for recovery but were moved back to the Somme sector before Christmas for a miserable winter near Flers.

On 14 November 1916, the Commanding Officer of 2nd Pioneer Battalion was wounded, and Hockley was appointed to command the battalion. He was appointed Temporary Lieutenant Colonel on 28 December. He 'relinquished' this temporary rank, reverting to his substantive rank of major on 10 February 1917 upon the return of the Commanding Officer after his recovery.

In February 1917, the Germans began a fighting withdrawal from their positions in front of Baupaume the Australians pursued them. Pioneers were used extensively to fix the problems caused by the Germans' *scorched earth* tactic (on tasks such as railway and road clearance and

¹ The Hythe Certificate was issued by the School of Musketry at Hythe in Kent on completion of one of its courses and was regarded as a differentiating qualification especially for infantrymen. (Hockley visited England and other countries in the period 1906-09 at his own expense.)

reconstruction, drains, bridging and culverts, water supply, huts, and encampments, dry-stand for horses etc.).

Temporary Lieutenant Colonel Hockley was awarded a DSO for his work at this time: *For consistent good service and devotion to duty as second in command of the Pioneer Bn. Period October 1916 to February 1917. During the operations on the SOMME, he has shown himself to be a courageous and capable officer, is most zealous and a good organizer.'*

Hockley was Mentioned in Dispatches by Field Marshall Haig on 9 April as the battalion supported the attacks on the Hindenburg Line in the first and second attacks at Bullecourt.

On 7 September 1917 the battalion moved to the vicinity of Swan Chateau outside Ypres in preparation for the Battle of Menin Road, planned for 20 September.

On 19 September 1917 a German shell exploded in the garden at Swan Chateau, headquarters of the 2nd Pioneers, and Major Hockley was severely wounded.

Major Hockley died of wounds the following day, 20 September 1917, aged 39 years. He was one of eight USC members killed in action on the Western Front. His parents predeceased him - his father died in 1913, his mother died in 1916 - and he had never married.

He now lies in Lissemore Military Cemetery, Poperinge, Belgium.



Sources included:

- Australian War Memorial
- National Archives of Australia
- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents